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DRAMATISTS OF THE PRESENT DAY

BY

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Thos. Turnell

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TO

ALGERNON SWINBURNE

AUTHOR OF

CHASTELARD, A TRAGEDY,

This little Volume

IS INSCRIBED BY

HIS FRIEND

THE AUTHOR.

DRAMATISTS OF THE PRESENT DAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE belief is wide spread that the English stage is in a sickly mood. Those who should best know its condition loudly lament its decline and are proposing means of cure. The restorative measures which have already been suggested are diverse. Last year there was a prolonged discussion on the subject in the press, between authors, actors, and managers. Mr. Boucicault, who had a remedy, originated the controversy. For eight years he had, it seems, been contemplating a revolution in the theatrical world. In the lapsed interval much was achieved; but one thing remained for him to accomplish. On the 19th of October, taking the public into his confidence, he divulged his scheme. "The final step in the revolution I contemplated,"

he writes to a daily newspaper, "remains to be accomplished. We must reduce the prices of admission." In the triple capacity of actor, author, and manager, his experience had been vast and varied, and his judgment on things dramatic must be received with respect. "Except," says he, "when some very great attraction brings out a reluctant public, one-half if not two-thirds of the nightly occupants of the high-priced places are persons admitted to garnish empty seats." Even when some very great attraction brings out a reluctant public, the private boxes are rarely filled, or are filled by people who have not paid for admission. In America, where this pestilent system does not prevail, it is not uncommon, he assures us, to see half-a-dozen persons contending which of them shall pay for all. Any six gentlemen going to the stalls of a London theatre would not, he thinks, be disposed "to enter into a lively contest as to who was to be the favoured individual who should pay for the whole party." Our system is wrong. The present tariff of admission is prohibitory. Prices must be reduced and—the drama will flourish. But

theatrical doctors disagree. Mr. Henry J. Byron, also actor, author and manager, declares his belief that, as matter of fact, high-priced houses are more remunerative than low-priced, and that the theatre being a luxury "people will pay well for it." Mr. Andrew Halliday, with experience "not so great as Mr. Boucicault's, certainly, but still considerable," shares this opinion. Mr. Halliday, unlike Mr. Boucicault, thinks people enjoy the payment of a heavy sum of money for admission. At Drury Lane, at all events, where, I presume, one of his "dramas" was then on the boards, were nightly to be seen "scores of persons complaining, not that the price of the stalls (seven shillings) is too high, but that they cannot obtain seats for any money." He himself was connected for a time with a theatre where the price of a stall was five shillings. What happened he tells us—"When the young swells came at night and threw down their sovereigns, they seemed quite surprised on receiving fifteen shillings in change, and often asked if the money-taker had not made a mistake." Poor young swells! How dejected must have been their air on learning the sad truth that

no mistake had been made, and they had saved two shillings each ! But the manager was not stone. Too goodnatured to resist the obvious wishes of his young patrons, he made a change. "After a season," continues Mr. Halliday, "the price was advanced to six shillings to please them, and it did please them. They came in greater numbers, and the manager made more money. Since then another advance has been made, and the swells now pay seven shillings cheerfully." Managers of small theatres could not under such circumstances be expected to feel the force of Mr. Boucicault's reasoning. One of these, Mr. Bancroft of the Prince of Wales's, affirms that "on several occasions in the old days intending visitors to the dress circle have actually left the theatre when told that the charge was only three shillings, but no one grumbles about paying five." The felicity such people would have in paying ten shillings or twenty he does not attempt to describe, but leaves us to imagine. At length the controversy died out ; without conclusive decision being made whether cheap admission to the play-houses would revive the drooping drama.

Some think improved ventilation, the abolition of

fees to attendants, and greater attention to the comfort of audiences would have the effect desired. I should like to see these several changes made; but there is no well-grounded hope that such reforms would serve to elevate the stage.

Others are of opinion that want of good actors is the main cause of the decay they deplore. With these I cannot agree. It is true the public seldom have opportunity of seeing in London a trained company of actors. The members of a troupe do not form an organism unified, vitalized, and in which all the parts are subordinated to the whole. There is no adjustment of the constituents. The interest is immoderately dissipated or is centred in one character who appropriates to himself the exclusive honours of the stage, and around whom baser actors and supernumeraries, grievously out of tune, destroy by their careless and slovenly action and gestures the integrity of the piece. We name him alone a man of genius whose intellectual activities are co-ordinate, in whom one faculty does not predominate and reduce into subjection the others, and, similarly, we confer titles of praise upon those per-

formances only wherein supreme harmony exists between the parts. With rare exceptions this harmonious co-operation is not observable on the London boards.

The frequent changes made in a troupe, the vicious system of job-acting, the insane desire which prevails among dramatic artists to act unduly for themselves, and not duly for the piece, and the incompetence of the stage-manager, himself ignorant of his prime duties, combine in the result. I do not think an English actor of position would abase himself to take slight pantomime parts, such as we have lately seen M. Got, most eminent of the *Comédie Française*, unhesitatingly assume. With him, stage exigencies do not form a cardinal consideration. He is interested only in his own rôle, and, consequently, he becomes one of many instead of being part of one. But we have individual actors of indisputable merit. Those who have seen Jefferson as "Rip Van Winkle," Dominick Murray as "Shylock," Hermann Vezin as "The Man of Airlie," and his wife as "Clothilde," should desire no better acting. And, not to mention

others, Webster, Wigan, Mathews, Craven, Belmore, are men of rich mimical gifts, equal to their parts, each of them, within his appropriate range, capable of adequately personating any character a writer might create for him.

To improve our school of acting, and, at the same time, revive the decaying glories of the stage by the constant production of masterpieces, a theatre subsidised by the state and independent of private pecuniary speculation is, it is thought, essential. The notion is not new, but it has lately received significant support. At the complimentary breakfast given to the members of the *Théâtre Français*, on their departure from England, Mr. Alfred Wigan, who had been selected to represent the histrionic art of this country, expressed his desire to see here, an institution analogous to the *Conservatoire* and the *Théâtre Français*, in Paris; and the visit of the famous French company, would, he hoped, give fresh vigour to a movement in vindication of the necessity for such aid. Mr. Tom Taylor, too, writing recently on the subject, reproduced and supported an opinion of Mr. Planché,

that the stage has become degraded. With the masses, the proximity of the theatre to the tap ; and with the upper classes, foul appliances and appurtenances, less gross but more dangerous, have, he thinks, been the immediate cause of the debasement. That the stage and its surrounders are in our time more immoral than at any previous period, I am unwilling to believe ; but I shall not here stay to consider or discuss the point. Mr. Planché and Mr. Taylor, affirm that the drama is in a degraded condition, and are agreed upon the remedy to be applied. What they and their supporters desire is—“The *assured* existence of a theatre in which the masterpieces of our unrivalled dramatic authors should be constantly and worthily represented, where—

‘Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn,’

should be uttered by actors who can feel and express them to an audience ‘fit,’ however ‘few,’ without the fear that their salaries will not be forthcoming on the following Saturday, and that the manager, disheartened by the appearance of empty benches, will change the bill, discharge a company he has

jobbed at a week's notice, and endeavour to outrival his competitors by pandering to the predominant taste of the public."

They think it "a national disgrace, that there should not be one play-house in this vast metropolis, where those who can still enjoy the most sublime poetry, the most brilliant wit, and 'the pure well of *English* undefiled,' may resort for an evening's rational and intellectual amusement afforded by a creditable representation of the masterpieces of our unrivalled British dramatists." They wonder, since the state does not subsidise a theatre, why "not one English nobleman, not one English merchant prince, steps forward to lend a hand to raise the drama from the dust and oblivion into which it has gradually fallen, until it is actually unknown to the rising generation, who become naturally inoculated with the predominant taste of the public."

Mr. Planché, Mr. Tom Taylor, and Mr. Wigan, are men whose opinions should be weighty, and I am aware their views are supported by others equally entitled with them to respect. But I cannot agree with the complaints, or the suggestions, they make.

I see no signs of the decay they see. On the contrary, it appears to me that the theatre is more prosperous now than it ever was. Nearly forty houses are maintained in London alone ; vast crowds attend a successful performance ; pieces have longer runs than ever ; dramatic authors obtain princely incomes ; managers, with occasional lapses into bankruptcy from undue speculation, retire with good fortunes ; and capable actors are paid for their services at a rate ludicrously disproportioned to what men earn whose profession is not to amuse. The critics pretend that art has declined in reciprocal proportion to the advance made in stage appointments, and complain that the drama, although it has secured the alliance of music, painting, poetry, and dancing, has deteriorated to burlesque. It is true that we often have colour and spectacular effect in place of psychological development of character ; that the acting often subserves pictorial splendour ; that busts and limbs clothed in diaphanous dresses prove attractive ; and that the music which most gratifies an audience is composed of strains already familiar to the patrons of that hot eminence, the gallery.

But success is not achieved only by such means. If a travesty of "Black-Eyed Susan," retains the stage for several hundred nights, so does a spectacular drama such as "The Colleen Bawn," and so also do pure comedies, such as "The Two Roses," by Mr. Albery, and those left us by Mr. Robertson, in which there is complete absence of sensational or spectacular effects. Nor, so long as Lord Lytton's "Lady of Lyons" continues to be the most popular play of the present day, can it be said that even the poetical drama is neglected. Indeed, I fail to observe any manifestation of public indifference towards the drama. The enormous increase in the size of London, and the existing facilities for reaching it from all country parts, have had the effect of multiplying the number of play-goers, who are now so numerous a body that any piece, fairly written and well acted, will prove successful. The mind of a true artist is exhibited in the Boors of Teniers as well as in the Transfiguration of Raphael. And so in things dramatic. Whether a piece is passionate and poetical, or a comedy in which pathos and humour are blended, whether it presents realistic scenes of

ordinary life, or is a melodrama composed of extraordinary incidents, if the work is well done, it will be duly appreciated. Every variety of dramatic production has its admirers and supporters.

On the other hand, I frankly admit that the British stage does not maintain that influential position it formerly occupied. If by "decline of the drama" is meant loss of consequence, the prevalent cry is well founded. Nobody ever so superficially acquainted with dramatic affairs will deny that the drama has ceased to be an educational instrument. The means, however, that have been proposed for the revival of its former importance appear to me to be altogether of fruitless nature. No alteration in the price of the admission to theatres, either in the direction indicated by Mr. Boucicault, or in that implicitly counselled by his partners in the discussion, nor any reform effected in front of the stage, will have the effect of elevating the drama to the pitch of consideration it once enjoyed. The proposal to establish in London a theatre for the constant representation of dramatic masterpieces has, at first sight, some uncertain claim which recommends it to our attention. We

have the example of the *Théâtre Français* endowed with £10,000 a year; but the case is not parallel with ours. The Frenchman must have his theatre, as he must have his *café*. He is usually debarred from sharing the stronger excitements of politics, and the state, whatever form of government prevails, is glad to divert his mind into other channels. He can sit contentedly at the representation of a piece which lasts for hours, and can return on the following night to see its termination. With us, the theatre is not a necessity. Of dramatic as of other wares more and less valuable, the supply must be regulated by the demand, popular taste will dictate the nature and quality of popular amusements. The stage as faithfully reflects the age in our day as it did in the time of Shakspeare, of Wycherley and Farquhar, of Sheridan and Goldsmith. If the masterpieces of our unrivalled dramatists are placed on the boards with magnificent appurtenances and fail to attract audiences sufficient to remunerate the outlay expended in their production, it is because the taste for them has become extinct. What is termed the legitimate drama is neglected

because it is not suitable to the requirements of the present day. Every age has a fashion of its own, and its intellectual apparel must be as well-fitting as its personal attire. We admire the mediæval chronicles, and do not complain of a decadence in taste, if the age declines to accept them as models of historical composition. The dead bury their dead.

The chief supporters of our theatres are country people, incited by the advertisements and criticisms they have seen in the London papers ; those of the nobility afflicted with *ennui*, who have no engagement for the night ; busy professional men who come at fixed intervals with their families ; by men who go to theatres from habit, just as they smoke tobacco, and a large number of green-grocers and other shopkeepers, who have received orders for displaying play-bills in their windows. These are the ordinary patrons of the drama, and it is their taste which has to be consulted in the selection of a piece. To expect a manager to produce what he knows will be unremunerative, or to sacrifice himself for the purpose of what is termed “elevating public taste,” is unreasonable. Indeed I

know nothing more unreasonable, unless it is the demand for a subsidised theatre, in which shall be "worthily represented" dramas the public do not desire. A claim may be made with equal justice for a subsidy in aid of the establishment of a pottery manufactory to instruct the public taste in the ceramic arts; or of a furniture mart to be maintained with a similar object. It is no duty of mine to show how offensive to the great body of managers and actors would be the exceptional privilege, because I am convinced that in the country where 'fair play and no favour' is a prime maxim in public affairs, the agitation for a subsidy will not thrive. Even should the ingenious theorists succeed in their alternative scheme, and prevail upon English noblemen or English merchant princes, to "step forward and lend a hand to raise the drama from the dust and oblivion into which it has gradually fallen," the result cannot but be disappointing, not only to the noblemen or merchant princes who lend a hand (*i.e.* pocket), but to the general public. The clique of forward busy-bodies who would inevitably control the committee of management, operating without

pecuniary risk, would were they to consult the predominant public taste in the selection of pieces for representation have solid advantage over other houses. As, however, their avowed aim is to transform the prevailing taste into something higher, by supplying "the most sublime poetry, the most brilliant wit, and the pure well of English undefiled," the helping hand must assuredly be liberal. Agitation may create a theatre, but cannot find an audience. The managers would have to secure their audiences by gratuities; for those who alone appreciate the pure well of English undefiled, do not go to the theatre to find it. And this is at once the reason why the drama has lost its influence, and why it cannot be restored. At one time the most intellectual and scholarly people habitually visited the play-house, and statesmen and men of letters were not ashamed to learn from the dramatist. The dinner hour was then earlier; the evening had to be spent; and there was no place in which it could be more agreeably and economically spent. The men who mould the thought of our generation do not go. Their field of intellectual recreation is widened, and

the social changes of our time, provide them with other and more profitable means of mental excitement. The day has long passed, since a statesman learned history from the drama; and intellectual aids have so multiplied themselves, that men of parts have ceased to concern themselves with dramatic affairs, or frequent the theatre for the sake of culture. Till they return, there is little hope of the drama being controlled, except by the predominant taste of its regular patrons.

CHAPTER II.

LORD LYTTON.

LORD LYTTON is a man of high aspirations. He is also a man who has an amount of energetic enterprise seldom possessed by such a character. His importunity is as great as was that of the woman in the Gospel, and the public is his unjust judge. He will not hearken to a first denial, but gains a suit by his continual coming. Soon after attaining his majority he published a work of fiction, the merits of which were not apparent. The following year he produced "Pelham," and the world pronounced him a man of genius. He wrote an epic poem, with Arthur as the hero, and it was received with disdain by presumably competent critics; yet, on the appearance the other day of a new edition, the same poem was treated by the highest literary authorities

with the consideration due to a work of supreme excellence. In the year 1836 a play from his pen, entitled, “The Duchess de La Vallière,” was performed at Covent Garden, and, although more poetical than the poem, failed. But the playwright did not therefore despair. Two years later, undisheartened by hostile criticism, he produced at the same theatre his “Lady of Lyons”—and the drama became the most popular in our language, and now brings to the author an annual income as large as that of two or three country parsons. As versatile in his pursuits as in his knowledge, Lord Lytton is poet, novelist statesman, orator, political pamphleteer, essayist, and dramatist. In each department he is influential, and in each he has secured for himself a place of honour.

Lord Lytton’s contributions to the stage are not many: “The Duchess de La Vallière,” in five acts (1836); “The Lady of Lyons; or, Love and Pride” (1838); “Richelieu; or, the Conspiracy” (1839); “The Sea-Captain; or, the Birthright” (1839); “Money,” a comedy (1840); “Not so Bad as we Seem; or, Many Sides to a Character,” written in 1851, and first represented in that year in aid of

the Guild of Literature and Art; and "The Rightful Heir," a new version of "The Sea-Captain," produced in 1868, form, I believe, a complete list of his pieces. All these dramas have the same merits and the same defects. Lord Lytton is the best storyteller I know. A brief tale of vengeance told at Naples by one of the characters in his novel "Zanoni" has never been surpassed for the wondrous art with which the incidents are blended and the effective force of the climax is strengthened. In constructive skill and artistic treatment, indeed, Lord Lytton has not a superior. When he has a conception perfected in his mind, he works it out till the construction harmonizes with the artistic plan. Nothing is omitted; nothing is wanted. No irregularities are permitted to interfere with the completion of his design. Everything is conformable with the preconceived idea. His artistic instincts are successfully revealed in all his dramas. The main incident of his most popular piece are to be found in a well-known French tale, the "Bellows-mender." Lord Lytton has, however, if my recollection is to be trusted, departed from the original in a

most essential point. The hero of the tale declines to marry the victim of the ignoble conspiracy. Claude Melnotte, on the contrary, accomplishes the unrighteous act by which he gratifies at once his love and his revenge. Here the psychological treatment of character adopted by the Frenchman is indubitably to be preferred ; but for stage purposes the unerring instinct of the English author led him to the modification which has made his play an exemplary specimen of dramatic form. No caprice diverts him from his main purpose. The progress of his story is never deranged by episode. All the details have essential use, and the reason for their introduction is plainly seen. The fifth act of "The Lady of Lyons" opens with the entrance of three officers just returned from the campaign, and they, in discussing with General Damas the rapid promotion of one of their comrades, Morier, disclose, in the most natural way, the career of the hero during the two years and a half which have elapsed since Melnotte changed his name and became a soldier. An inferior artist would have evaded such a method of developing the plot. He would have made Melnotte himself reveal

by soliloquy what is necessary to be learnt ; or some subordinate would announce the facts, after the fashion of a messenger in the Greek drama. Lord Lytton's method is at once artistic and effective ; and, when we hear the conversation, we at once believe it is just what we should expect. All his plays—not excepting "*The Duchess de La Vallière*," which failed mainly on account of its theme—have this same merit. But although no drama can be good which is defective in this respect, it is possible for a drama to be admirable in construction and yet have the gravest faults. It is the case with Lord Lytton's plays. They are symmetrical ; for stage effect the situations are good ; and the artistic treatment is excellent ; yet in important particulars Lord Lytton is excelled by men greatly inferior to him in pretension and fame. His dialogue abounds in vices ; it is weak and stilted when, to the casual ear, there is seeming strength. I look in vain for intellectual vigour. Where the author aims at being elevated, he is flatulent.* Some of the speeches

* For example, let me give a passage from the "*Lady of Lyons*,"—the passage in which Melnotte describes to Pauline the

made by Evelyn in the comedy of "Money," resemble what we hear from one of those high and mighty heroes who strut the boards of a transpontine theatre. They have meaning; but the meaning is not worth discovering. In the first act

home to which he would lead her. It is usually received with great favour on being rhetorically delivered from the stage, but what can be more exaggerated in sentiment and hyperbolical in expression—

"A palace lifting to eternal summer
Its marble walls, from out a glossy bower
Of coolest foliage musical with birds,
Whose songs should syllable thy name ! At noon
We'd sit beneath the arching vines, and wonder
Why Earth could be unhappy, while the Heavens
Still left us youth and love ! We'd have no friends
That were not lovers ; no ambition, save
To excel them all in love ; we'd read no books
That were not tales of love—that we might smile
To think how poorly eloquence of words
Translates the poetry of hearts like ours !
And when night came, amidst the breathless Heavens
We'd guess what star should be our home when love
Becomes immortal ; while the perfumed light
Stole through the mists of alabaster lamps,
And every air was heavy with the sighs
Of orange groves and music from sweet lutes,
And murmurs of low fountains that gush forth
I' the midst of roses !"

there are long-winded common-places which must exhaust the patience of any audience. Here is an example :—

“Look you, now—robe Beauty in silk and cachemire—hand Virtue into her chariot—lackey their caprices—wrap them from the winds—fence them round with a golden circle—and Virtue and Beauty are as goddesses, both to peasant and to prince. Strip them of the adjuncts—see Virtue and Beauty poor—dependent—solitary—walking the world defenceless ; oh, *then* the devotion changes its character : the same crowd gather eagerly around—fools—fops—libertines—not to worship at the shrine, but to sacrifice the victim.”

The last words of the same personage, who is described as a man of genius, is this platitude—

“ My friends,—we must confess it—amidst the humours and the follies, the vanities, deceits, and vices that play their parts in the great Comedy of Life—it is our own fault if we do not find such

natures, though rare and few, as redeem the rest, brightening the shadows that are flung from the form and body of the TIME with glimpses of the everlasting holiness of truth and love."

Occasionally we light upon a happy repartee, and now and then a genuinely epigrammatic turn is given to the dialogue. As a rule, however, energetic feebleness in expression is the cardinal characteristic of the plays. When his Lordship desires to be more than usually vigorous, he invokes the printer's aid, and enhances the value of his thought by the use of capital letters. Ease, polish, and fastidiousness are apparent; but delicacy and strength are equally wanting. Even the most effective stage situations suffer from this defect. When, in "*Richelieu*," the Cardinal, with haughty scorn, daunts Baradas, his triumphant rival, and draws round his ward the circle of the Holy Church; when, in the same play, Richelieu addresses Julie de Mortemar as child, and has for reply, "Child no more! I love, and I am woman!"; and when, finally, in the last scene of "*The Lady of Lyons*," Melnotte reclaims his wife,

the language and sentiment are not on a par with the situation. The scene in "The Lady of Lyons," to which I have referred, is a fair specimen of Lord Lytton's best manner, and I cannot refrain from reproducing it. Pauline is to be wedded to an old lover, who, by his wealth, is able to save her father's credit. The notary is about to hand the contract to Pauline, when Melnotte, who is present, seizes and tears it. Thereupon the bridegroom expectant and the father of the bride desire explanation, and find it in these words :—

Melnotte. Peace, old man !

I have a prior claim. Before the face
 Of man and Heaven I urge it ! I outbid
 Yon sordid huckster for your priceless jewel.
 There is the sum twice told ! Blush not to take it.
 There's not a coin that is not bought and hallowed
 In the cause of nations with a soldier's blood !

Beauseant. Torments and death !

Pauline. That voice ! Thou art—

Melnotte. Thy husband !

[*Pauline rushes into his arms.*

As might be foretold, his Lordship's sentiment does not transcend his language. Love is his most frequent theme. His notion of that master-passion is, however, the notion incident to puberty. It is admittedly irresistible ; but he does not conceive it possible for a man or woman really to love except from motives of personal admiration. He is ignorant that titles and high rank have been the exciting cause of love as profound and intense as what is awakened by physical beauty. Men have sacrificed themselves for love of princesses of whom they were personally ignorant ; and it is well known that the traditional idea about titles and rank is as efficacious with some minds in begetting love as golden locks or bright eyes are with others. In delineating the other passions, Lord Lytton is similarly faulty. He is full, as well in his novels as in his plays, of a sort of passion ; but it is the passion which Frenchmen, more especially, affect when they do not feel it. We have glow without fire—light without heat.

But there is another and more important defect to be noticed in the plays.

In the conception and presentation of character,

his Lordship is infirm. He does not give us characters, but characterizations. His treatment is traditional; his types are traditional; and the sentiments with which he endows them are traditional. His sounding-line does not reach the depths and shoals of our nature, but sinks no further than the surface currents. The Arthur of his epic is an impossible hero. Even Richelieu, the most effective of his stage characters, has no real individuality. I do not object to the representation because it is not the Richelieu of History and the Memoirs of the time. Mr. Carlyle, in his work on the French Revolution, introduces us to a gallery of portraits which have little resemblance to the personages with whose names they are labelled. But they are men and women. Their dress is diaphanous, and we may see the texture of their skin. They breathe and live; and we anticipate their speech and action. Lord Lytton has no such creative power. His men and women are people with whom we cannot claim relationship; they are artificial; they are spurious; they have none of those manifold complex shadings we find inseparable from

persons in real life. The tints and tones of character which make a man himself and no other have been forgotten by the artist, or his colours have failed him at the moment they were needed.

Lord Lytton's success as a dramatist is due to his ability in making common-place sentiment agreeable to the common-place mind. His plays find response in the hearts of the young, and people of imperfect education. Deficient in high qualities, his work is sufficiently elevated to make an audience believe themselves capable of understanding high things, and sufficiently mean to permit their comprehending what is placed before them. To say Lord Lytton is a great dramatist would be beyond the truth. He has the executive temperament of an artist, and his production, whether poem, play, or novel, has a mechanical regularity of form; but he wants the power of giving life to that form. He is not a philosopher, as he supposes himself to be; and his worldly wisdom, conveyed in high floating language, is more often false than true. All, however, will be ready to admit he is an admirable man. The courage and perseverance he has shown are great,

and his example as a worker in literature is ennobling. Whatever opinion we may hold as to the value of his accomplishment, he must have the credit of being a notable instance of those rare minds, whose capabilities equal their capacities. None of his talents have been unused.

CHAPTER III.

WESTLAND MARSTON, LL.D.

DR. MARSTON has a theory of art. I do not mean that he is an innovator who has invented a method for himself. On the contrary, it is his distinction that the method he employs is traditional, and that its results are identical in kind with what has been left us by a long line of predecessors. His first success, gained so far back as the year 1842, was with a five-act tragedy, "The Patrician's Daughter"; and his latest contribution to the stage is a poetical play, "Life for Life," in which he manifests the same principles that are indicated in his earliest work. He is, with the possible exception of Lord Lytton, the sole living representative of the legitimate drama. It will be no news if I announce that the legitimate drama does not flourish on the

London stage. A manager who is rash enough to produce a legitimate piece, soon finds that his benches begin to thin. His reward is not great. Critics applaud his taste and his enterprise; everybody is anxious (for the sake of others) that his experiment should succeed; but theatre-goers avoid his house. We have numerous theories in explanation. There are men who try to persuade themselves that only "something" is wanted to make the world return to its old dramatic loves, and once more admire what it admired in times past. Had we better actors, or had we critics with sounder judgments, or had we a Lord Chamberlain who is acquainted with his duties, the legitimate drama would, they think, resume its pristine rank and condition. I do not believe this. Changed habits in the people make them regard with apathy the representation of "the highest order of dramatic composition." Modern audiences are averse from seeing "the gradual development of a character" according to prescribed forms, and in language heard only on the stage. They prefer seeing him with the springs of his motives already traced and clearly

marked ; they must have him speak in natural tones and appropriate language ; and, more than all, they insist that he and his development shall be subservient to the story.

People are not to be blamed for this, as they are not to be blamed for declining to use the costume of a former age instead of that common in our day. In itself it may be of more value, but, being inadequate to daily use, it is wisely discarded for something else. This is what must be said about Dr. Marston's legitimate dramas. "The Patrician's Daughter;" "The Heart and the World," a play in five acts ; "Philip of France and Marie de Méranie," a tragedy in five acts ; "Strathmore," a tragic play in five acts ; "Ann Blake," a play in five acts ; and "A Life's Ransom," a play in five acts, are all notable works ; and some of them in certain important particulars must rank with the best productions of our dramatic literature. But a play is written to be played, and if it fails on the stage, no compensatory merits can counterbalance its cardinal defect. Dr. Marston and the legitimate dramatists seem to ignore this manifest truth.

They aim, not so much to satisfy those to whom they address themselves, as to produce effects in conformity with the ideal standard in their own minds. The objections I have to make against their views cannot be new, for they have already been made by others; nor are they unknown to Dr. Marston, for he has himself discussed them. In his preface to "*A Life's Ransom*," the matter is fairly if not fully examined. The public complain that the school to which Dr. Marston belongs in constructing their dramas delay the introduction of incidents until considerable progress has been made in the story, and that they adopt an ideal style of dialogue in preference to that in daily and familiar use. This charge, Dr. Marston, so far as the play in question is concerned, frankly admits to be true. To me the avowal is equivalent to an acknowledgment that the initial phases of his drama are not interesting, and that the language is not suitable for our day. In extenuation, however, the author pleads the necessities of the distinct school of art to which he belongs. Representing man in his action on circumstance and in his passion under its re-

action, he demands time and opportunity for "the gradual development of those characteristics which are afterwards to be the source of events ;" yet, on the same page, he takes credit for having told in five acts a story "which occupies less time than many which have been written in three." On the question of diction, he propounds a doctrine which forms the best defence of the poetical drama. In real life, it is admitted, men do not vent their passions in phrases of imaginative beauty. But the poet, by endowing his characters with powers of expression which in actual life they do not possess, does not fail in truth ; for he makes men speak as they would, had they his capacity. The imperfection in their faculties, which, in crises of profound passion, checks the adequate expression of their feelings, is thus redressed by the dramatist, who compensates us for overpassing the reality of visible life by disclosing to us the life which is invisible to all except himself. This view no one will be disposed to question. I am ready to admit that a real Macbeth would be unable to express his terror and remorse in such language as Shakspeare has

given him, and that the sight of the air-drawn dagger would be indicated only by some convulsive motion or brief ejaculation. The words of the soliloquy are the very words that a man in Macbeth's position feels, and would express, had he the requisite ability. They are appropriate to the speaker and to the situation. It is possible, however, for a writer to be unable to exemplify his own precept. Dr. Marston himself, for instance, in "The Patri-cian's Daughter," makes Lord Lynterne request his solicitor to read a marriage settlement in these words :—

"Good friends, assembled here to confer honour
Upon the near espousals, I beseech
Your kind attention while this gentleman
Reads in your hearing the accustomed deed
Determining the rights and property
Of such as stand affianced."

It is difficult to believe that a nobleman of the year 1842 would so express himself, even had he

the capacity. This is not and never was “the adequate expression” of either gentle or simple.

The dramas, however, have faults other than those of diction. “The Patrician’s Daughter” itself is defective in very important particulars. Although over-redundant in imagery, the dialogue is often elegant and brilliant, and contains passages equal in beauty to any that one could easily name. In the construction of the piece and in the delineation of character there is much to censure. The plot is not ingenious; but it has the merit of being clear and of giving occasion for good stage situations, and the demerit of furnishing a *dénoulement* of the most unwelcome character. I see no occasion arising out of the story for the painful termination of the play. Probably the author refers it to art canons of which I have no knowledge. But the behaviour of Edgar Mordaunt, in taking revenge upon Lady Mabel by declining her hand when it was offered, because it was refused when first sought, is not to be excused on any of the principles of Art with which I am acquainted. Here is the passage. Lord Lynterne, having, in the words I have already quoted, called

upon the lawyer to read the marriage settlement, is interrupted by Mordaunt, who retards the action by starting a discussion on the treatment due to a man of humble origin. He is interrupted by the Earl—

“ *Earl.* You trespass, sir, too much upon the time

Of the high company. Methinks 'twere well

The lawyer should proceed.

Mord. I am indifferent.

Earl. Mean you to wed my daughter ?

Mord. (turning fiercely on him) No !
(all rise in surprise).

Pier. Malignant viper ! you shall dearly pay
The debt of this disgrace.

Mord. Yet hold awhile.
If you accuse me, grant me the same
rights
That all accused enjoy. Hear my de-
fence !

That over, I will bide whatever shape
Your anger wills to take.

Earl. Begone, sir ! leave us while contempt stills
wrath.

Mabel. I do beseech you hear him. I am curious
To learn what sins of my commission
urged
To deed so pitiful. If I had wronged—

Lord C. Even then it was most pitiful revenge."

I agree with his Lordship—the revenge is most pitiful, and would undoubtedly excite indignation in real life. The last words of the heroine are, "I am happy—very happy ;" but it is difficult to conceive that her feelings can be shared by any audience.

"Strathmore" has the same defects. This play is undoubtedly the author's best. It is full of delicacy and true humour. The several pairs of lovers, with their separate interests converging to one issue, while a solemn event looms behind the whole action, tend to absorb the reader or the spectator in the progress of the story. It fulfils one at least of the requirements of dramatic art, for it excites the interest of the audience. The characters are natural, and are naturally developed ;

the situations are well managed; and the author reaches the height of his literary power contemporaneously with the climax of the passion exhibited—in other words, the poet and the dramatist are in harmony. Even here, however, the action is at first tedious, and the close of the drama disappointing and unsatisfactory. As in "The Patrician's Daughter" it is the heroine's death jars upon our feelings; so here, it is the hero whose sad end unpleasantly excites our sensibility. The main object of the dramatist, as of every artist, is to produce pleasure. Pain may, of course, be represented by him; the deepest agony of our nature may be used as material for elaborated pleasure, to the spectator; and this Shakspeare and the Greek dramatists, for instance, have accomplished. But in the cases under consideration, I do not think the author has been successful. In its total effect a dramatic representation should please; and if an author, in dealing with any form or mode of pain or misfortune, fails to transfigure it in such a way as to win the sympathy of his audience, he has a lesson to learn. Sympathy is the base of Art. If, therefore,

instead of exciting this emotion, a dramatist leaves on the mind of the on-looker a feeling of dissatisfaction, he should be sure that his performance is faulty. If the existing termination of the two pieces I have named is necessary to make them tragedies, I could wish the unhappy ending had been evaded. The tragedies would then have been admirable plays.

In all the dramas mentioned, Dr. Marston seems to have worked according to his conscience. Every word is weighed and every sentiment considered before dealt out. His characters, as I have said, are natural, but natural only in a sense. We never meet them ; we never expect to meet them. They are types whose archetypes exist only in the author's brain. Those of them who do not occupy a foreground are introduced not for their own sake, but to exhibit contrasts in situation with the chief personages. It would be wrong to say these dramas have not succeeded with the public. As literature, several of them have gone through many editions, and, with the exception of "The Heart and the World," all of them, when represented on the stage,

are received by the press and the public with great approbation: yet there can be no doubt that the poetical drama, even sustained by Dr. Marston's genius and supported by such exponents as Mr. Macready, Miss Helen Faucit, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean, Mr. G. V. Brooke, Mr. and Mrs. Hermann Vezin, Mr. Dillon, and Mr. Phelps,—all of whom have been cast in his plays,—is unable to maintain itself. This is no reproach to Dr. Marston. Nor can I see that it can fairly be charged as a reproach upon our time. “*A Midsummer Night's Dream*,”—that exquisite burlesque, in which Shakespeare has satirized the actors and the masques of his day,—was, I am told, less remunerative to the managers of the theatre where it was acted than a burlesque, simultaneously running, at a little house in Soho; yet I do not, therefore, condemn the public, or pretend to think they prefer the burlesque author to Shakespeare.

Those who have the sort of intellectual appetite the legitimate drama is designed to gratify do not seek entertainment in a theatre. Every age has its fashions, and the legitimate drama is not in fashion

now. Fortunately, Dr. Marston has not confined himself to the production of legitimate plays. The qualities he exhibits in these are, however, the very qualities which would fit him to excel in any department of the drama to which he might address himself, and he has given us proof of his ability to achieve triumphant success in other directions. "Borough Politics," a domestic drama in one act, produced at the Haymarket, in 1846, is a stock piece in the country; "The Wife's Portrait," produced at the same theatre, in 1862, always charms; "Donna Diana" gains the attention and applause of an audience solely by the admirable manner in which the progress of the story is conducted, and, latterly, we have in "A Hero of Romance" and "The Favourite of Fortune," two pieces in which the author has displayed the highest results of his art. Both these plays abound in felicitous characterisation, and are as free from the twaddling realism of the tea-cup-and-saucer drama as they are from the tricky realism of the sensational drama. They shew us pictures of life, painted by an artist who in his presentation knows what to select and

what to reject from among the realities which surround him. The psychological element which in his tragedies predominates over the dramatic is in these subdued or altogether excluded. In conception and in treatment they are equally meritorious; and while presenting us with highly - finished sketches of every-day life the painter's brush is so delicate that no exception can be made to its tones. By producing his later comedies, Dr. Marston not only made opportunity for so popular an actor as Mr. Sothern to prove that he is capable of exhibiting something higher than buffoonery of the Dunderdry type, but has placed himself in the first rank of modern English comedists.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. F. C. BURNAND.

BURLESQUE has high uses. From the time of Aristophanes, it has performed service in the cause of intellectual progress. As an agent for assaulting dullness and folly, its force is unequalled. It is sometimes good for us to examine the wrong side of a tapestry, and see the threads of the picture we have admired not wisely but too well; and this benefit we should owe to the author of a burlesque. His work need not be ephemeral or insignificant. Buckingham's 'Rehearsal,'—one of the best burlesques in any language, ill-natured though it is, and levelled by the writer against a better man than himself,—holds high rank as a literary composition. It is the result of intellectual labour, and so abounds in well-directed wit that it had the effect

of driving Dryden from tragedy to comedy. The burlesques of our day are neither effective as satire nor good in themselves. Newspaper critics condemn them, intelligent play-goers avoid them, and the authors themselves apologise for producing them. The disrepute into which they have fallen is not due to any change in public opinion as to the merits of that branch of the drama to which they belong: as a nation, we still delight in satire, and welcome it. Nor is it to be attributed, as many think, to the short skirts of the girls who personate gods and heroes. No woman is shocked (for herself) at seeing one of her sex display on the stage more of her limbs than she exhibits in a drawing-room; and it is not pretended that any man's sense of delicacy is hurt. Burlesque owes its degradation to the delinquencies of burlesque-writers themselves. Of these Mr. F. C. Burnand is, perhaps, the most prominent offender. Mr. Burnand is not a novice in his art. His earliest piece was played about twenty years ago; and since then he has produced a series of burlesques and farces, the names of which would fill this page. His first appearance before a London

audience was, however, made in 1860, with "Dido," a burlesque, at the St. James's Theatre. This proved a success. "Ixion; or, the Man at the Wheel," produced at the Royalty in 1863, was a greater success; and, finally, "The Latest Edition of Black-Eyed Susan," presented at the same house in 1866, became so popular as to secure a longer consecutive run than almost any other drama produced. In their appreciation of this piece the critics differed from the public; they failed to perceive moderation or delicacy in the treatment, and predicted ill results to Mr. Burnand and his art. And they were right. In "Black-Eyed Susan" we see indications of that recklessness which, in the latest productions of the same pen, has come to a wild and furious pitch of extravagance. "The Military Billy Taylor," the successor of "Black-Eyed Susan," is an inane piece of absurdity, with no merit either in thought or expression. Lady Clara, one of the characters, having declared that drums ought to be called wind instruments, "because they are entirely played with blows," propounds a query: "Who invented drums?" she asks. "Drummed if

I know," is the reply ; whereupon she expresses her conviction that it must have been the ancient Romans, in order that, being asked why, she may rejoин, " Because, if we don't hear of drums in their time, at all events we hear a great deal about the Styx."

On the same page from which this specimen of Mr. Burnand's wit is extracted, I find the following :—

" General. But, ah, Clara !

Lady C. Yes.

General. Eh ?

Lady C. I beg your pardon, General ; I have a sister called Clara.

General. Ah ! is she like you ?

Lady C. Very. We're twins.

General. Which is ?

Lady C. Both.

General. Ah ! Then there are more than one of you."

Such is Mr. Burnand at his best. That the action

of a burlesque is not apparent we might pardon. A flimsy plot is to be overlooked—if we only have wit and humour. Wit and humour are, however, never forthcoming ; but, instead, a jingle of unelaborated nonsense assails our ears. Mr. Burnand seems to fetch his jokes and good sayings. We know when he is going for them ; and, before he introduces them, we have already guessed what they are to be, and, consequently, tire of the process by which they are introduced, paraded, and dismissed. They never appear to be the offspring of the occasion. On their genesis in the author's brain they may have been spontaneous ; but on presentation they wear the air of laborious incubation. What a genuine pun is, Mr. Burnand, the most reckless of punsters, seems ignorant of. I cannot find in any of his published pieces an example of a perfect pun. He has never equalled Frank Talfourd's description of buccaneers—men who

“Without a ‘by your leave,’ or ‘if you please’ upon it,
Whate’er they sees upon the seas they seize upon
it.”

And the author of this abounds in true puns—words that resemble each other in sound, but differ in sense. Why some of Talfourd's burlesques are not reproduced, I do not understand. They were appreciated when first played, and would be appreciated now. Mr. Burnand has, however, others besides Talfourd whom he might emulate. Mr. H. J. Byron, to whom we owe a long series of burlesques, all of which have some literary merit, has abandoned the production of those amusing pieces which helped to make the Strand Theatre famous as a burlesque house, and now confines himself to comedies and sensational dramas; while Mr. Planché has ceased to amuse himself and us with those delicate, graceful, and intelligible creations which for years gave delight to play-goers. But each of these has left Mr. Burnand hints he might follow with advantage. Mr. Reece, too, whose "Whittington Junior" and "Robin Hood" were lately running at the Royalty will furnish him with good examples of style. Mr. Reece has not a remarkable sense of comic situation; he is often dull; his actors frequently depend upon themselves: but in literary execution he is

excellent. I know nothing better in its way than a witticism in his "*Stranger*," where the Countess Wintersen, about to use a golden fluid to convert her raven locks into the fashionable red, is entreated by her husband to abstain from the process:— "If," says he, "you must dye your hair, love, keep it dark." Although Mr. Burnand is not to be compared for his literary merits either with Mr. Talfourd, Mr. Planché, Mr. Byron, or Mr. R. Brough, in one respect he is superior to his contemporaries and his predecessors. No one equals him in what is technically and professionally called "business." To this with him everything is secondary. "*Black-Eyed Susan*" owed its success to the grotesque dancing of one actor, and to the buffoonery of another in personating a drunken captain. A stage direction in one of the scenes—"Dame hangs bonnet on peg, but keeps crinoline for future business,"—is characteristic of all Mr. Burnand's work. To his appreciation of stage business he owes his success, and to his trust in stage business must be attributed his recent failures. Of late he has altogether neglected literary effects. Cockney rhymes and vulgar re-

partees are his stock-in-trade. In "Black-Eyed Susan" Dame Hatley announces that Susan cannot be sent to the Fleet—

" Because it is as plain as is my fist,
The Fleet, as used to was, does not exist,
And what is more—

Rak. What's more ?

Dame. Why, William ain't ;
He bean't no more.

Rak. He bean't ?—you mean he bain't.

Again, William says—

Now heave ahead ! heave on !

Sha. Your wink's a nod.

Dol. The sailor's always heavin'.

Gua. Ain't it h'odd ? "

What the jokes are here I confess I do not see. If he produces comic situations, however, Mr. Burnand is satisfied : the rest he leaves to the actors. Accordingly, in "Black-Eyed Susan," the old device

of a drunken Captain Crosstree, pursuing his prodigious collar, was repeated with success. For four hundred nights or more the Captain ran after his collar, and the public ran after the Captain. Mr. Burnand must have found rhyme irksome, for latterly he has written in what he probably calls prose. But if his verse is execrable, his prose is worse. “F. M. Julius Chæsar,” “Elizabeth, or the Don, the Duck, the Drake, and the Invincible Armada,” and “The White Cat; or, Prince Lardi-Dardi, and the Radiant Rosetta,” are nothing better than spectacular iuanities. To me it is melancholy that a man educated at Eton and Cambridge should put his name to such productions, and that poor players should have to study and load their memories with them. Three or four propositions by Euclid, interlarded with popular songs and dances, would be equally efficient, and I shall not be surprised if Mr. Burnand’s next “new, grand, and original” burlesque should be the multiplication-table divided into scenes, with dancing and music, to amuse the feeble-minded to whom mathematics are not an intellectual treat. Neither of the three pieces I have mentioned is intelligible. I do

not object to a man being dressed as a woman only I require the man in his assumed garb not to transgress the bounds of decorum we set for the personage represented. This is a principle of art of which Mr. Burnand seems to have no notion. In "Black-Eyed Susan" Dame Hatley was offensive. In "Elizabeth" the author has out-Burnanded Burnand in this respect. Queen Elizabeth at the council-board enforces her arguments with fisticuffs and by the frequent use of the ruler. This brisk action is afterwards supplemented by the Queen in a strange manner. Her Majesty, personated by a man, performs a dance, then jumps upon the back of Don Whiskerando, the Spanish Ambassador, and —wriggles there. The exhibition was received by the few people who, the night I was present, remained in the stalls, with evident disapprobation, whilst the boys and girls in the gallery received it with shouts of approbation. What "Elizabeth" burlesqued I failed to discover. Everything was obscure. The action did not grow out of the piece ; but the piece depended upon the action. "The White Cat" is even less meritorious. For dialogue

we have a mixture of nonsense and badsense, and jingles which the author has not taken the trouble to chime are given us for verse. "F. M. Julius Cnæsar," "Elizabeth," and the "White Cat," are the legitimate outcome of an attempt to ignore literary merit, and depend for success upon stage business. I am ready to admit that such pieces as those left us by Mr. Planché, flecked as they are with Aristophanean wit, are not sufficiently piquant for this generation. His extravaganzas, in which fantastic subjects are treated with elegant fun and the follies of the time satirized in a becoming spirit, might perhaps be unsuited to the strong digestion of our day; but I am consoled by knowing that the random twaddle which Mr. Burnand, at some expense to theatrical managements, periodically issues as "a grand, new, and original burlesque" has ceased to be acceptable. It would have been a misfortune, not only for dramatic art, but for literature itself, if it had succeeded. It will be a misfortune, too, for both, if burlesque, debased by the extravagance of its most prominent professors, should prosper in its present guise.

There are other burlesque writers of the day ; but as these have the faults of Mr. Burnand, with additional faults of their own, there is no occasion for me to mention them and their works.

While discussing modern burlesque in a spirit of condemnation, it would, however, be unfair to allow the name of Mr. E. L. Blanchard to rest in the rank of writers of meaningless nonsense. Mr. Blanchard has produced a long list of dramas and farces ; but his chief distinction lies in another direction. For more than twenty years he has supplied the pantomime openings at Drury Lane Theatre. These are full of dainty thoughts and gentle words, and, underlying the "fun," will be found a solid basis of instruction, for Mr. Blanchard never forgets that he annually addresses two or three hundred thousand children whose minds are to be impressed for good or evil. I find he has carried out a progressive series of subjects in which he is tenderly considerate of what will please and harmonize with young minds. "Harlequin Caxton," for instance, shows the origin and results of printing ; "Watt and the Birth of the Steam Engine," the

marvellous powers of the new agent ; and "The Land of Light," the mysteries and beauties of hydrogen and oxygen. His second series expanded the nursery rhymes of our youth into stories, attached to each of which is a definite and distinct moral lesson. If only that he has never been coarse and vulgar, and preserves his stage free from the vices seemingly inherent in modern burlesque, Mr Blanchard deserves commemoration.

CHAPTER V.

MR. DION BOUCICAULT.

THE several modes in which Mr. Boucicault has benefited his fellow-men are known to every reader of newspapers. Whenever there is a lull in politics, a Boucicault controversy is started in one of the journals, and our prolific playwright acquaints the world with his services. At one time he showed how he had elevated the position of dramatic authors, by himself earning vast sums of money with his plays. Then he claimed credit for improving the accommodation and comfort of the public in London theatres. He simply called attention to the subject, and—"as a result, seven new and commodious theatres were built in the West End. Actors obtain much larger salaries, and dramatic authors have been benefited in a still greater degree."

Mr. Boucicault is always “venturing to suggest” reforms ; and a note from him has, we must suppose, the desired effect. Having done so much for actors, dramatic authors, and the public, he has lately done something for managers—he has given them a hint. “In the United States,” he tells them, “the price of admission has always been two shillings and one shilling. Let a magnificent theatre be built on the American plan, and it will prove a triumphant success—it will revolutionize theatrical affairs.” Of course, the price of admission in the United States has not always been two shillings and one shilling, and the managers of the thirty-six existing theatres are unable to perceive how their treasuries can be benefited by the success of the magnificent theatre built on the American plan. But we must trust Mr. Boucicault, not only because he writes “with authority” (he always writes with authority) and “out of his strong convictions,” but because he gives his advice “in the interest of all concerned, but more especially in that of the cause to which I have devoted my life’s work—the intellectual amusement of the people.”

Such claims as his obviously demand consideration.

Mr. Boucicault began early to devote himself to his mission. In 1841, while in his twenty-first year, a comedy in five acts bearing his name, and entitled "London Assurance," was produced at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. Mr. Farren, Mr. Keeley, Mr. Harley, and Mr. Charles Mathews, together with Mrs. Nisbett and Madame Vestris, were in the cast, and the piece was highly successful. The plot, which turns upon a son being his father's rival in love, is not new; the characters are not new; Spanker is an old friend; Dazzle had often trodden the stage before; Lady Gay Spanker is a vulgarized Di Vernon, with a touch in her of Baby Blake. None of them, moreover, are painted in full—they are all scratchy sketches. The whole conception of the piece is derived from previous comedies, and the dialogue is the conventional dialogue of a past age. London and Cheltenham are named as the scene of the play, and we are to suppose the time to be 1841. Any other places and any other time would, however, be equally appropriate. Sir Harcourt

Courtly, a nobleman of *ton*, addressing the lady to whom he has proposed elopement, speaks of "a heart offered to your astonished view by one who is considered the index of fashion, the vane of the *beau monde*." And in discussing with his valet the plan of the elopement, the same nobleman remarks that "hesitation destroys the romance of *faux pas*, and reduces it to the level of a mere mercantile calculation." The heroine's phraseology is even more absurd: she talks of watching "the first tear that glistens in the opening eye of morning, the silent song the flowers breathe, the thrilling choir of the woodland minstrels, to which the modest brook trickles applause;—these, swelling out the sweetest chord of sweet creation's matins, seem," &c. "London Assurance" is not a good comedy; but, notwithstanding its defects, the construction is so admirable, and the stage situations are so effective, that an audience forgets the faults of the piece, and only admires the skill of the dramatic architect.

Since the production of this comedy the author has written a vast number of dramas. The majority of them have failed in securing public ap-

plause. Those, however, which succeeded have gained so great a measure of popularity, that people regard their author as a man of invariable success. It was in 1860 that Mr. Boucicault reached the climax of his fame. In that year there appeared at the Adelphi Theatre "The Colleen Bawn," which had an uninterrupted run of two hundred and thirty nights, and has since earned applause in the principal theatres in this country, in our colonies, and in the United States. "The Colleen Bawn" was followed by "The Streets of London," "Arrah-na-Pogue," "Flying Scud," "After Dark," and other pieces, the latest being "The Rapparee," recently withdrawn from the boards of the Princess's Theatre. Altogether Mr. Boucicault has, it is said, written about one hundred and fifty dramas.

Mr. Boucicault is not an original writer. His most popular plays are adaptations. "Love in a Maze" has in it an unmistakably French element; "Used Up" is "L'Homme Blasé;" "Louis XI." is by Casimir Delavigne; "The Corsican Brothers" is by Dumas; "The Long Strike" is dramatized from a novel; "The Colleen Bawn" is by Gerald Griffin.

When he does not take a story wholly, he selects parts of several, which he vamps; and the playwright's constructive skill is so great, that usually the welding is unperceived. Constructive skill is, perhaps, Mr. Boucicault's chief merit. Studied carefully, the later pieces seem as if the author, having conceived a startling incident, had had the scene painted, and then written a drama to suit the situation. To a critic, the result is as unsatisfactory as the setting of words to music instead of music to words. With a sensational foundation, everything is sacrificed to the predetermined effect. The task of each actor is strictly defined; no intelligent independence is allowed him; he is a marionnette. The executive ability of a man qualified to display his art is repressed. The exponents of the story are ill-assorted; a series of incidents follow each other with rapidity; and the delineation of character and passion is sacrificed to stage-mechanism. Bodily peril, in fact, forms the basis of interest; and to the carpenter is entrusted the task of producing the effect which we should owe solely to the dramatist. "After Dark," for example, depended for its success

upon the movement of a sham train, and "Flying Scud" upon puppet horses. As an adept at stage devices, Mr. Boucicault has no equal. In "After Dark" there is what is termed a "front scene," which, in arrangement and dialogue, is, perhaps, unsurpassed by any modern dramatist.

The moral colouring of Mr. Boucicault's dramas is generally unhealthy—at times even offensive. The mental palate of the spectator is more than dissatisfied, it is nauseated. The characters to which we are introduced bring with them an unhealthy atmosphere. In "After Dark," and in "Formosa," this tendency is sufficiently manifest; in "Jezebel, or the Dead Reckoning," adapted, with slight change, from the French, it is intolerable. Not only is the construction of this piece bad and the sensational effects impossible, but the passions portrayed are so ruthless and hateful as to completely alienate the sympathies of any audience. Mr. Boucicault seems to take delight in delineating the mean traits of a man's nature; and when he depicts virtue it is usually negative virtue. He is to be blamed not because he describes what is immoral, but

because he will not see that what is immoral is unsuitable for purposes of art. No heroic passion thrives in his hands. When his theme is clearly discerned, we perceive a low end is to be achieved. We are never impressed by elevated sentiment. His deviation from fact, as when in "Formosa" he represents the Cambridge crew storming a sponging-house the night before a race, or in "Flying Scud," makes a casual jockey win the Derby, is excusable. His deviation from nature in the characters he presents is unpardonable.

No man is more happy in dialogue than Mr. Boucicault. When he is dull he is very dull; but it is only on rare occasions that he exercises the privilege of nodding. As I write I cannot recall one of his plays from which I could not make pleasing extracts. The Irish dramas especially are full of admirable examples of drolleries and delicacies in expression. We constantly meet with tender passages which captivate by their wit and humour, or are irresistible for their pathos. In "The Colleen Bawn," and in "Arrah-na-Pogue," they abound. It is only an Irishman who could have given us the

answer made by Myles-na-Coppaleen, when asked by Eily O'Connor if he still loved her. " Didn't I lave the world to follow ye ? and since then there's bin neither night nor day in my life. I lay down on Glenna Point above, when I see this cottage, and I live on the sight of it. Oh, Eily, if tears were pison to the grass, there wouldn't be a green blade on Glenna Hill this day." Again, what can be happier than the manner in which the same hero joins the hand of the woman he worships with that of his favoured rival ? " When ye cease to love her," says he, " may dyin' become ye ; and when ye *do* die, lave yer money to the poor, your widdy to me, and we'll both forgive ye." I have alluded to the excellence of a small portion of the dialogue in " After Dark." Here and there, even in the most slovenly and carelessly written of the plays, passages are to be found admirable not only as a vehicle for advancing the progress of the story told by the dramatist, but in themselves. Indeed, no modern writer has said better things on the stage than Mr. Boucicault.

To resume. I cannot admit that the amusement

Mr. Boucicault has furnished his generation is altogether, or in great degree, intellectual. In his plots I fail to see moral purpose developed ; there is no unfolding of character and passion ; the effect he produces on an audience is the same in kind as that produced by a man who endangers his limbs and life on a trapeze ; he stimulates the nerves rather than the intellectual faculties. It must be added, that he owes much to others. Sometimes it is the plot he takes ; sometimes a character. Incidents he selects from various sources, and without hesitation weaves them into his own story. He is not above supplying himself even with phrases from other men's works. Whence comes the straw he does not ask, so long as it is suitable for his brick-making. In saying this, I do not intend to depreciate the undoubted merits of Mr. Boucicault. The question to be asked before forming an opinion on the position he occupies as an original dramatist is this—Does the effect he produces belong to himself, or is it due to others ? Does it depend upon what is borrowed, or has it a source in what he himself adds ? Nobody who has taken the trouble to con-

sider the matter will, I think, have any doubt in replying. Such pieces as "Louis the Eleventh," "Rip Van Winkle," and "The Corsican Brothers," in great measure owe their popularity to the theatrical tact of the English adapter; and all the success achieved by those plays which may be called original productions is due to the same cause. Mr. Boucicault, in things theatrical, adorns what he touches. He has, moreover, the ability to accomplish what he desires. If, therefore, notwithstanding the wit, the rough humour, and deep pathos they undoubtedly contain, most of his dramas leave a savour of uncleanness on his audience, it must be accounted for on other ground than that of design.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. JOHN OXFORD.

MR. OXFORD is one of the most prolific dramatists of the present day. He has written farces, comedies, comediettas, serio-comic dramas, operas, operettas, prologues and epilogues for plays, and words for songs ; he has made translations from the French, from the German, and from the Italian ; and for a long series of years he has given us his opinion of all the important dramas that have been produced on our stage. According to trustworthy authority, the number of pieces he has contributed to the London theatres is no fewer than eighty. But, although he has done many things, it cannot be said he has done much. His intellectual energies have not been concentrated on any great work, but have been dissipated on slight performances. I can call

to my mind nothing original of his which has taken high rank as literature, or for which one could reasonably predict lasting popularity. The chief produce of his dramatic activity are farces, or dramas resembling them in kind if not in sort. His earliest pieces were "My Fellow Clerk," "I and my Double," and "A Day Well Spent," brought out at the Lyceum in 1835 ; and since that year his pen has never been long idle. The late dinner-hour of our day, combined with the increasing disposition of cultured people to show no emotion, is inimical to farce. Still, there are many writers ready to supply fore-pieces and after-pieces to play the audience in and out of a theatre ; and of these Mr. Oxenford is one of the most successful. Some of his pieces are highly popular. "Twice Killed" and "Only a Halfpenny," are always productive of uproarious mirth. Neither of these, nor any other farce by Mr. Oxenford, is, however, to be compared with many of the established pieces by other writers. Mr. Maddison Morton's "Box and Cox," for instance, in the perfection of its structure and its motive, is superior to any he has produced. The happy idea of bring-

ing into juxtaposition two persons the exact converse of each other in habits, in tastes, in dress, in calling—for the one ministers to the outside of a man's skull and the other to the inside—cannot be repeated with success. But Mr. Oxenford's farces invariably divert an audience by the felicitous dialogue and the comic situations unfolded. Even “*Twice Killed*,” which is nothing higher than an anecdote expanded, is laughter-producing. We are not expected to give credibility to the incidents of a farce; but I know no farce by Mr. Oxenford which does not seem, on presentation, a transcript, although exaggerated, of natural and ordinary events. His serio-tragic pieces, too, of which “*The Porter's Knot*” is the best known, have all many excellences. The characters are not original; they are types placed in the required situation. But they have idiosyncrasies which tend to make them seem original. The scene in “*The Porter's Knot*,” in which Samson Burr finds that his son, upon whom the hope of his life has been placed, is unworthy of the sacrifices he has made, is remarkably happy. Smirk, a London money-lender, suddenly appears in the little seaport

town on the Kentish coast where the elder Burr resides, and where the younger Burr is about to establish himself as a surgeon, and presses his claim upon the father for the amount of the son's debt. At first the father is enraged, and calls his creditor a *pettifogging scoundrel*; but, having sudden thought of his wife overhearing the angry dialogue, he entreats forbearance:—

“*Smirk.* What! do you appeal to the feelings of a *pettifogging scoundrel*?

Samson. Oh, sir! I am a plain man—an uneducated man. I have not learned to pick and choose my expressions when my temper is upset.

Smirk. Then, sir, as you call ‘scoundrel’ the man who merely comes for his money, what pretty word would you bestow on the man who borrows money without the slightest chance of repaying it?

Samson. Oh, I don't know—I don't know.

Smirk. Well, I will tell you the expression that will be used by people in general. They will say that although Mr. Burr, senior, is an honest man, Mr. Burr, junior, is a —— swindler!

Samson (enraged). Take care what you—(*suddenly checked*). No ! he's right. Gussy is a —. Ugh ! I could send my fist into his malicious face—but he's right ; he's right ! (*Humbly*) Sir, pray don't use any more hard words. There is a poor woman in the house who would break her heart if she were to hear you—and *my* heart might be broken too ; but I don't so much mind that."

By this scene, although the play is an adaptation from the French, Mr. Oxenford has proved he can move the tears as well as the laughter of his audiences. In the same direction, however, he has been excelled by others. Mr. H. T. Craven in his original plays, "Milky White," "Meg's Diversion," "The Post Boy," and "The Chimney Corner," has given us examples of serio-tragic dramas finer in the most essential qualities. Mr. Craven's construction is imperfect, and his dialogue is vitiated by bad puns ; but in all literature I know not a more effective situation than that in "Meg's Diversion," where Jasper Pidgeon, a humble mechanic, finds that his brother, who has been educated as a gentleman, is

loved by the woman he himself adores. The brother slighted Meg for her sister,—partly because he is desirous of avenging insults placed on Jasper, but chiefly because his love for the sister is intense. The chivalrous conduct of Jasper under the circumstances has never been surpassed. Here is the passage :

“ *Jasper*. Carry out the hopes you have raised in that poor girl’s heart.

Roland. I tell you I am pledged to her sister.

Jasper. Her sister ?

Roland. Cornelia—and as to your generosity, dear boy, I am sorry to break the news in the midst of your anger; but you have nothing ! Eytem has just discovered—what I long suspected—our uncle made a recent codicil, stating that though some little folly of mine had incensed him, he forgave, and left me all.

Jasper. And take it ! What is wealth to me who have none to share it ? But won’t *you* prove yourself worthy of it by acting with honour to Meg ?

Roland. Once for all—I cannot.

Jasper. Then, brother, be hanged ! You are no brother of mine ; and I have no means of revenging poor Meg's wrong but by this arm, which before now has fought for justice in a workshop, and thrashed the rascal as I will you—yes, *you!* (*throws off his coat*). The name of a penniless mechanic—the name of his father—is disgraced by a gentleman ! Let manhood be the referee !—Come on ! ”

Mr. Oxenford's pen has not been confined to dramatic works. He is an accomplished scholar, and has enriched the literature of his country with contributions from other languages. English readers unacquainted with German know Goethe's “Dichtung und Wahrheit” only through his translation, and it is to him we are indebted for Eckermann's “Conversations with Goethe,” a work which, I believe, has higher literary merit than the original. On all he produces there is a bloom of vigour. The characters in his dramas may be imperfect ; but their outlines are firmly and freely traced. Whatever he writes—whether play, translated song, or original criticism—is obviously the outcome of a robust

mind, expressing itself with condensed but careless force, in language always appropriate to its intention. He is as masculine a writer as Dryden. Within the limitations he assigns himself, he has no superior.

It is, however, by his dramatic criticisms that Mr. Oxenford is best known. Born in 1812, he was educated for the law; but he soon renounced legal pursuits, and has for many years occupied a prominent position as theatrical critic of the most influential journal in Europe. A critic such as he holds no contemptible office. He is, or should be, a lawgiver in Art. He takes, or should take, his stand on a higher plane than that occupied by the author criticized. Except that, perhaps, the executive faculty is weak in him or has been altogether denied him, he should be on equality in his art with the practical artist himself. Having before him the examples of Goethe and other less famous minds, it is no reproach to him that he has failed as an artist. In England, however, critics of the dramatic art, at least, do not regard their calling with the honour it deserves. With theoretical criticism they do not

aspire to deal, but habitually content themselves with announcing the name of a new piece, revealing its plot, and giving their opinion on the merits of the actors. This, to speak mildly, is theatrical reporting, not dramatic criticism, and might be performed for any journal with as much benefit by the gentleman who describes accidents and offences as by the representative to whom it is now assigned. Minute exposition of art-principles is not needed; but some hint of the reason why one dramatic representation is applauded and another condemned would not be unwelcome. The hint, however, is not given. We cannot see the factors out of which the resultant is obtained, and the verdict has little worth. Mr. Oxenford, who, by the admission of his fellows, is recognised as "the best dramatic critic of his time," cannot be proposed as a model. On the question whether a dramatic author is the proper person to be a dramatic critic, I have no intention of touching. I do not charge Mr. Oxenford with being unfair: I only believe him to be inadequate. He deserves grateful praise for that having the strength of a giant he does not use his strength

unmercifully. From observation and inquiry I can report that he has never written with a malicious pen, but has generously befriended the beginner. His good-nature is a theme with all young authors. It is, however, this very good-nature which checks and hampers his usefulness as a critic. His lenity to managers, authors, and actors has had injurious effect upon dramatic art. Had he persistently assigned harder censure and more judicious praise, he would have repressed many of those absurdities and evils of the modern stage which intelligent play-goers now mourn. A student of German literature, he must well know that to criticize a work of Art, reference should be made to something beyond extrinsic facts; and yet he never makes attempt to reach the essence. He mildly gives us his opinions; but the bases of his judgment are not to be discerned. He proportions his notice of a piece to the pretensions of an author, or the importance of the house at which it is produced, and not to the value of the work. From his decisions the public do not learn why one drama is bad and another good. He has never instructed our taste in things dramatic. He

has planted no seed that has ripened. I expect him to show play-goers that elaborate charades are not comedies equal for their dialogue to those of Sheridan; that a writer who uses without acknowledgment the plots and plays of another should be treated with contempt; that a farrago of nonsense, "the drift and purpose of which," he admits, "is utterly unintelligible," cannot contain "a part that completely suits the fair directress"; that the making of novels into plays simply by the use of paste and scissors does not entitle a man to be called a dramatist. But lovers of the drama are not indebted to Mr. Oxenford for such service. His ways are the superficial ways of other critics, and his power, as theirs, has been ill-used and misused. He is the best of our theatrical reporters—but he is only a theatrical reporter.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. T. W. ROBERTSON.

THERE is no ground for apprehension lest one branch of the drama should be encouraged at the expense of another. Play-goers are catholical in their tastes. Formerly the remote in time and place was most agreeable to the public. The novelist found profit in describing feudal times, or painting the scenery of distant lands, or sketching the manners of the high nobility with whom only a few of his readers were acquainted. And the dramatist resembled him. He was successful when he depicted life elevated, intellectually or socially, above his audience. What was heroic was received with applause. In our day “stagey” has become a word of reproach. An audience no longer enjoys the representation of what is beyond its reach. The

present and the near now best satisfies it. In the drama, as in prose fiction, realism is wanted. Every man judges what is laid before him by his own experience. Resemblance to what he is acquainted with is the measure of excellence. Truth to current existence is the criterion of merit he applies to a drama. In one way Mr. Boucicault administers to this requirement ; in another the late Mr. Robertson is a successful example. Both are intensely real. Mr. Boucicault places at night before a play-goer the horse-race or boat-race he has witnessed during the day. Mr. Robertson gratifies him by reproducing on the stage the very dialogue he has just heard in his family circle. He has contributed to our stage a whole series of plays so commonplace in their motive as to be aptly termed the tea-cup-and-saucer drama. "M.P.," the latest, is as thin and meagre as any of its predecessors. The best parts are not on a higher level than the worst chapters of the most carelessly written of Mr. Trollope's novels. Experience and extended observation do not seem to have benefited the writer. As he was in "Society," so he was in "Ours," in "Caste," in "Play," in

“School”; and so he is in “M.P.” To see one is to see all. A poor gentleman in contrast with a rich upstart, is the theme of “M.P.” The foundation of the subject is well laid; the stages of dramatic development are successfully reached; and the capacity and capability of each actor is utilized to the utmost. But of the higher qualities of dramatic literature there are only the faintest traces. We miss the elaborate situations of M. Sardou with whom Mr. Robertson has been compared; there is a lack of action; and the author’s estimate of nature and character is false. Yet, as each of my readers who is also a reader of what is called dramatic criticism well knows, lack of action is compensated by wit and humorous felicities of dialogue. Unexpected repartees and sly retorts are the characteristics of Mr. Robertson. I waited for the smart sayings of which I had heard much; but I heard nothing above what is occasionally found in country papers under the heading “Varieties.” A young Quakeress says to her lover: “I cannot tell thee because thou art not a maiden”; upon which he replies, “Well, consider me a maiden.” I looked

round to see if this was brilliant, and found others looking with the same object. Two people in the stalls giggled; another thought if he did not giggle he might be marked as a man who could not understand wit, and he giggled too; then other people giggled; and I registered the observation as an example of brilliant repartee. The same lovers go on a moonlight excursion to see "Ophelia's willow"; and as they are obviously making their way in a contrary direction, the lady ventures to hazard the conjecture that her companion is taking her the wrong way. Then the lover reassures the maiden with the remark, "Oh, it looks better from a distance." This secured general laughter. Everybody for some time had been expecting something good, and when the good thing came they appreciated it. Another repartee was equally well received. The lover, looking affectionately at the young lady by his side, propounded the query, "Suppose it were now night?" and received the sensible reply, "Then it would be dark." But he was equal to the occasion. With a languishing look, he exclaims, "I wish it were." This rejoinder raised a burst of approving laughter.

There is another pair of lovers in the play, who say even smarter things. Cecilia Dunscombe (well personated by Miss Marie Wilton) is discussing marriage with her future husband, and expresses her opinion that "it is a pity courtship ended in marriage." He, thereupon, is puzzled, and asks why? She answers promptly, "Because it would be much better that marriage ended in courtship."

I must record that no dramatist ever economised his force with greater skill than Mr. Robertson. His story is slight, but so deftly does he work that the fabric produced is of excellent texture. In discussing topics he is highly ingenious, and these he accordingly elaborates; but when he conceives a situation I notice it is more powerful the less its inventor has to do with it. The termination of the second act in "Ours" may be instanced in proof. Here the action that is to create the effect is removed from the presence of the audience. The regiment is supposed to be on its march for the Crimea, and as the shouts of the populace and the strains of the regimental band are wafted through

the window our sensibility is affected, and we share the feelings we must suppose are manifested by the interested spectators on the stage. We perceive that the author has not the ability to give verbal expression to his conceptions, but invariably leaves each of his audience to interpret them according to the intensity or feebleness of his imagination. Thus again, in "School" I think it is, one of the acts ends with a girl retreating up an avenue. Her lover, from whom she has parted, remains standing on the spot, fondly gazing after the vanished form. Not a word is spoken; but he stands there in the lime-light intimating by a gesture what the dramatist should express in words. Then, after sufficient interval, the bell rings, the curtain falls, and the delighted audience applauds. In such cases the motive only belongs to the author. His audience become his collaborateurs and unconsciously forward an act, just as the people in a Music Hall, who, by request, join in a chorus and give the singer breathing-time. They help to fill in the outline presented to them and are at once actors and spectators. Such work, when skilfully done is, as

I have already said, highly effective ; but the merit it discloses is not of a literary kind. It may fairly be compared with that of a novelist who, when he has led us up to a point of interest, prints a row of asterisks with an implicit request that the reader will imagine the feelings or incidents he himself is unable to express. The cabinet dramas we are considering are full of asterisks.

Mr. Robertson's love-making has been highly lauded by the press, and a scene in "Society," had much effect in giving popularity to that play. The author was sagacious enough to withhold from publication all he has since written, so I am unable to quote from his later works. "Society," however, is before me, and I will reproduce part of the love-scene. The lovers are together in "a square at the West-end. Weeping ash over a rustic chair, trees, shrubs, walks, &c.; lights in some of the windows, &c., street lamps." The time is nine o'clock at night ; and the lovers expect to be interrupted by the party assembled at the neighbouring mansion, who, as we all know, according to invariable practice at the

West-end would leave the dinner-table to get a breath of air in the square :—

“ *Maud*. Time to go ?

Sidney. No ! What’s that ?

Maud. Some trimmings I’m making for our fancy fair.

Sidney. What colour is it ? Scarlet ?

Maud. Magenta.

Sidney. Give it to me.

Maud. What nonsense.

Sidney. Won’t you ?

Maud. I’ve brought something else.

Sidney. For me ?

Maud. Yes.

Sidney. What ?

Maud. These (*producing small case which Sidney opens*).

Sidney. Sleeve-links ?

Maud. Now, which will you have, the links or the ribbon ?

Sidney (*after reflection*). Both.

Maud. You avaricious creature !

Sidney (putting the ribbons near his heart). It's not in the power of words to tell you how I love you. Will you be mine ?

Maud. Sidney !”

I will not deny that this is true to life—every-thing is true to life which represents lovers as idiots; but I cannot agree with the dramatic critics who pronounce such dialogue to be vivacious and amusing, delicate and vigorous and fresh. Another passage from the same play, which I remember went with good effect, is the following. Tom Stylus, a journalist, who is alone in the parlour of the “Owl's Roost,” speaks :—

“ Love is an awful swindler ; always drawing upon Hope, who never honours his draughts ; a sort of whining beggar, continually moved on by the maternal police ; but 'tis a weakness to which the wisest of us are subject, a kind of manly measles which the flesh is heir to, particularly when the flesh is heir to nothing else ; even I have felt the divine damnation—I mean emanation. But the

lady united herself to another, which was a very good thing for me, and anything but a misfortune for her. Ah! happy days of youth. Oh! flowering fields of *Runnington-cum-Wapshot*."

Mr. Robertson has not confined himself to the production of this sort of thing. He has tried other departments of the drama, but with no great success. "*David Garrick*," the same story as that which was dramatized by Mr. Albery for Mr. Hermann Vezin under the title "*Dr. Davy*," was his first play of any importance. In 1867 his realistic drama, "*Shadow Tree Shaft*," was produced at the Princess's and failed. "*A Rapid Thaw*," at the St. James's, was another failure, and was withdrawn, after a few days. "*For Love*," at the Holborn, also failed. "*Dreams*," was a failure at the Gaiety, and "*The Nightingale*," was a failure at the Adelphi. Outside of the Prince of Wales's theatre he is unlucky. It seems he has been endowed by Nature with a special function of keeping the little house in Tottenham Street supplied with plays, most of them having a word of one syllable as title. It is clear this house

has had incessant prosperity since he joined the management. Each of the "new and original comedies," not excepting what was written in Germany, has had a run of success. But how to account for this is a puzzle. If we examine the first of the series, "Society," and the last "M.P.," in which we look for the result of matured reflection and improved execution, we do not find explanation. They are all in the same key, and have all the same defects. In the first, for example, nobody will pretend that Mr. Robertson presents us with a picture of what is called "society." Of course, life among people of the highest rank is, in essentials, the life of the most unrefined. Lords and ladies love and hate, and have ambition, and grow tired and hungry and sleepy just as the most uncultured people. But Mr. Robertson's pictures of such life—obviously the result of reflected knowledge derived from books and his own inner consciousness—are altogether wanting in those light slight touches which signify knowledge from within. These might be of small consequence, but it is these which give verisimilitude to the representation. Without them, the picture may

as well be labelled "Cornhill" as "Grosvenor Square." The behaviour of Lady Ptarmigan, in the last scene of "Society," is a libel. She has just been encouraging a rich and vulgar suitor for the hand of her niece. She has sent him to the young lady with the direction to "strike while the iron is hot." A few minutes after, having heard that a discarded suitor of higher rank had unexpectedly succeeded to a fortune and a title, she pretends ignorance of the arrangement just made, and that she had been only joking and thought the man she had deceived had also been joking. In "M.P." breaches of good manners continually present themselves. In one scene, a young lady goes up to another young lady, who has arrived at the house as a visitor, and *feels* her to see if she is real ; "for," says she, "you look like biscuit china." In his treatment, Mr. Robertson does not compensate for the deficiencies inherent in the subject-matter of the play. His knowledge as an actor enables him to give a sort of artistic construction to the piece, and he has the high merit of bringing on his characters at the right moment. But his desire to be smart spoils him. His wit does

not suit the occasion—or rather, it suits any occasion. It has reference to nothing in the play, and I cannot correlate it with what follows, or has gone before. It has been elaborated, and might have been inserted in any of his pieces, or might have been delivered by any of his characters. In "M.P." Mr. Robertson is hard upon burlesque writings. A young fool, who aspires to be an actor, is the medium of some harsh criticism on such works. I do not object to the criticism; but every intelligent person who listens will admit that it is misplaced here. The youth might as well have discussed the Eastern Question, spontaneous generation, or the potato-blight. Satire on such a subject, moreover, comes ungracefully from Mr. Robertson, whose puns and other verbal contortions in this piece where they are unsuitable, are inferior to what we hear in burlesque, where they are appropriate. The heroine, in canvassing during an election, secures some votes by kissing certain of the electors. She is asked what were the men? whereupon we find they were "plumbers and glaziers of the *puttiest* description." The style of all these dramas may

be known from the incidental quotations I have made.

Mr. Robertson is a realist ; the artificial and the ideal he eschews. Just as another dramatist introduces on the stage the real cab in which he has ridden to the theatre, so Mr. Robertson gives us the real conversation he has heard at the "Owl's Roost," or in the West End Square where people come out at night to enjoy the evening breeze under a weeping ash in front of their houses. I cannot say we do not want the commonplace artistically represented on the stage, for it finds an appreciative public ; I can only express my surprise that people pay to hear other men say behind footlights what they hear in their own houses.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. TOM TAYLOR.

JUST as Napoleon maintained there is no such word as "impossible," Mr. Tom Taylor holds there is no such word as "original." He does not know what it means, or he attaches to the term a meaning different from what it usually receives. In his Preface to "The Fool's Revenge," Mr. Taylor explains his theory of originality. When this play was first produced, some of the critics talked of the work as a translation of M. Victor Hugo's "Le Roi s'amuse," while others described it, more contemptuously, as a mere *rifacimento* of the *libretto* of Verdi's "Rigoletto." The truth of these statements Mr. Taylor denies. He frankly admits that "The Fool's Revenge" originated in an order given to him by a popular actor to convert the *libretto* of "Rigo-

letto" into a play. He frankly admits that, before converting the *libretto* of "Rigoletto" into a play, he looked at M. Victor Hugo's drama "with this object." The product, however, he contends is his. The motives of the Jester, the machinery by which his revenge is diverted from its intended channel, and the action in the court subsequently to the abduction of the daughter, are his own ; and "these features, I conceive, give me the fullest right to call 'The Fool's Revenge' a *new* play, even if it is disentitled to the epithet *original*—which is matter of opinion." I find on close inquiry that the originality of almost everything Mr. Tom Taylor has done is, to use his own words, matter of opinion. As I have hinted, his notion of originality is not identical with that of other men. It is good in its way ; but it has not yet found general acceptance. The popular actor who gives an order for the conversion into a play of the *libretto* of "Rigoletto," and gets instead a "new" drama by Mr. Tom Taylor with the part he desired, may not care to enter into a philological discussion as to the meaning of a word ; but others are not so indifferent as he. I

must confess that if a man takes the work—the printed thought, or, I may add, the manuscript thought—of another, calls Macedon “Monmouth,” Alexander “Alfred,” drowns the hero instead of smothering him, and assigns love instead of revenge as the motive of the catastrophe, I cannot induce myself to believe him to be an original dramatist. And I find I am not alone. On the first night of one of Mr. Taylor’s “new” pieces, I remember to have sat next to a very intelligent member of the press. He is an experienced dramatic critic. Upon my observing that there were good points in some of Mr. Taylor’s plays, my neighbour admitted the fact; but he supplemented his admission with the remark that what I had admired belonged to other men than the reputed author. “Surely,” said I, “‘A Sheep in Wolf’s Clothing’ was written by Mr. Taylor?”—“Ah,” said my new friend, evidently commiserating my ignorance, “I perceive you have not read ‘Une Femme qui déteste son Mari,’ by Madame de Girardin.”—“Well,” said I, “what of ‘Still Waters Run Deep’?”—“There is a sort of thing called ‘Le Gendre,’ by Ch. de Bernard,” was

the reply.—“I suppose you will admit that the drama ‘To Oblige Benson’ is the creation of the gentleman whose name appears on the title-page?” I remarked.—“You have never read ‘Un Service à Blanchard,’” was the rejoinder.—“Well, what of ‘The Hidden Hand’?” was my next question; “the scene is in Wales, and the persons of the drama are Welsh.”—“I refer you to ‘L’Aïeule,’ by A. Dennery,” was the answer.—“Surely you will admit that ‘Payable on Demand’ is the invention of Mr. Tom Taylor?” I asked.—“I take the liberty of referring you to ‘Feurige Kohlen,’” was the curt reply.—I then instanced “Babes in the Wood,” “An Unequal Match,” and “Victims.”—“It is clear to me,” said my interlocutor, “that M. Cormon was before your time.”—I began to be confounded. “May I ask you,” said I, turning to my informant, and looking him steadily in the face, “if you have seen the play entitled ‘Nine Points of the Law’?”—“I have,” was the reply of my imperturbable informant, “and I have also read ‘Clover Cottage,’ by Savage.”—“I suppose I need not inform you,” continued my communicative friend,

“that Madame Pfeiffer had something to do with ‘Twixt Axe and Crown’; that Mr. Gilbert is not altogether unacquainted with ‘Mary Warner’; that ‘Plot and Passion’ was claimed by John Lang; and that Mr. Taylor’s most popular drama, ‘The Ticket-of-Leave Man,’ is a version of MM. Brisebarre and Nuz’s ‘Leonard’?” All this information was not altogether new to me: still, I desired to encourage the conversation. “May I venture to ask,” said I, “if you have reason to suppose the drama we are now witnessing is derived from any foreign original?” My friend was expanding his crush hat. “Certainly not,” he replied with emphasis, pointing to the stage, whereon they were roasting Mrs. Rousby; “I know no other dramatic author who, left to himself, would conceive the notion of presenting before an audience such brutal realism as that.” And my friend left.

How far a man may avail himself of the labours of another in a work to which he attaches his own name alone, is a question not easy of decision. The practice of appropriating foreign skill appears to me to be on the increase, and Englishmen are not

ashamed to call themselves authors of what has been conceived and executed by others. Within the last year or two there have appeared several French works, in which various branches of science have been admirably popularised. These have been issued in this country, not with the names of the respective authors, but with those of the persons employed to translate the books, who announce in a preface that they are under deep obligations to the original writers. When one of the works goes into a second edition, the preface is omitted, and, if it reaches a third, the foster-father inserts another preface, and proceeds to talk of "my views," "my experience," and "my discoveries." Dramatic authors are more liable to this treatment than men of science, and dramatic authors obtain even less credit than their scientific brethren. English writers take French plays, "adapt" them, and then exhibit their imagination, not in their work, but in the belief that they themselves are the authors of the pieces produced. Of these, Mr. Tom Taylor appears to be a prominent and popular representative. He may be described as

the great foster-father of the Gallic drama. Most of his plays owe something to somebody other than himself. With his views of originality, Mr. Taylor could supply every stage in London. The area of his resources is almost unlimited. The fertile ingenuity of continental dramatists furnishes him with materials for fifty original plays a year. There is no occasion for him to rely on his own resources, and, emulating writers with whom bodily peril forms the point of interest, roast an actress in Long Acre. He should not waste his ability upon devising with a theatrical carpenter historical tableaux illustrating the life of Jeanne d'Arc, but confine himself to the production of dramas original—in the Taylorian sense.

It must not be supposed from what I have been saying that I object to the appropriation by an author of extraneous aid. Shakspeare levied toll upon mediæval chronicles and Italian tales ; Molière in composing “Tartuffe,” plagiarised his plot and whole passages from a foreign original ; and even Mr. Dion Boucicault makes use of the labours of other men. But there are degrees in appropriation. Shakspeare gave vitality to what he

borrowed ; and, as I have admitted in my notice of Mr. Boucicault, that prolific playwright adorns what he touches. Mr. Tom Taylor, on the contrary, does not improve what he emends. If I examine one of his plays without reference to its origin I experience a feeling of disappointment. I read it on its merits. I do not care if Mr. Taylor has adapted it from published sources ; I do not care even if he has derived the construction and working-out from the unpublished MS. of a foreigner. I ask myself, is it good ?—does it fulfil the condition of dramatic art ? I must confess that I have not read or seen any drama by Mr. Taylor which will bear the test of such examination.

Like Mr. Oxenford, Mr. Taylor has attempted every variety of dramatic literature. His industry is remarkable. He has written about one hundred pieces for the stage. Mr. Taylor's work is so varied in its nature as to make it impossible for me to indicate its characteristics. I cannot class Mr. Taylor. All his dramas have distinct individualities. They are as diverse as if they had been written by different authors, or were adapted from different

originals. No two are good for the same qualities. One is admirable in construction, but defective in dialogue ; while another, in which the polish of the dialogue is the most noticeable feature, is clumsily constructed, and contains incidents ill-knit and inappropriate to the culminating climax. Each has the merit of being an organism ; but the organism has no virility. The author writes as a scholar—too demonstratively as a scholar,—and obviously has æsthetic scruples ; yet he never exhibits the originality of intellect. In reading him a sentence occurs which seems full of significance in the meaning ; our attention is arrested ; and we pause to consider. But the pause converts the weighty sentence into commonplace. We are conscious, on consideration, that the writer is a man who is educated above his capacities.

The above notice provoked the following correspondence in the *Athenæum* between Mr. Taylor and myself :—

“I am afraid, to judge by the article, that its

writer has not seen or read more than a tithe of what I have produced on the stage. My reason for forming this conclusion brings me to the misstatement of matters of fact, which has led to this letter. Your critic describes me as 'the great foster-father of the Gallic drama !' adding, that most of my plays 'owe something to somebody other than myself.' I think there are few plays, or books either, of which this might not be said. But as to the specific charge, which forms the staple of the article, that I am a signal offender deserving a special scourging, in the way of borrowing from the French, I wish to inform him, and any of your readers who may be curious in the matter, that out of the hundred plays, more or less, which I have given to the stage, not more than ten are derived from French sources of any kind, and that of these ten not more than half are adaptations of French dramas—the others being founded on French stories or incidents mentioned in French history or memoirs. I leave it to the judgment of any of your readers who may be conversant with the history of our stage, present or past, if this proportion of original to second-hand works supports the charge,

which it seems the whole object of the article to fix upon me, of special sin in 'conveying' from the French and entire lack of originality.

"Again, with regard to that very portion of the play which has a foreign ground-work, and in answer to most of the arguments of the article, I take the liberty of reproducing here a passage from the Preface to 'The Ticket-of-Leave Man.' After stating that all credit for the invention of the story belongs to Messrs. Brisebarre and Nuz, I go on to say, 'But here my obligation to the French authors ends:' the dialogue is my own. I have made the personages in the play, its sentiments and its action, English; and I claim, on this ground, some, at least, of the rights of a creator. I have always conceived that the dramatist is at liberty to take his story whence he pleases, whether from life, from history, or from fiction. Scarcely any subject treated in the drama or in romance but has roots in something besides the author's personal invention or observation. In this free appropriation of his subject-matter, if in nothing else, the puniest playwright, who adopts a novel or a predecessor's piece, may claim fellow-

ship with Shakspeare. No one borrowed his subjects so freely and widely as the great master of all dramatists : he did not scruple to lay under contribution even the plays of earlier English writers ; recasting them, and giving the breath of his own life to their dead bones. I admit, at the same time, that it is perfectly fair that the sources from which an author derives his subject should be stated ; and it is fair, also, that a dramatist who invents his own story as well as its dramatic dress, should receive the additional credit which his inventive faculty deserves.

“I have invented many of my subjects—I have borrowed several : in my printed plays I have invariably mentioned the source to which I am indebted for my story. Of my longer comedies and dramas,—‘Victims,’ ‘The Unequal Match,’ ‘The Contested Election,’ ‘The Overland Route,’ ‘Payable on Demand,’ ‘Helping Hands,’ ‘The Babes in the Wood,’ and ‘The American Cousin,’ are strictly of my own invention, subjects as well as treatment. In the case of other pieces, like ‘Plot and Passion,’ ‘Masks and Faces,’ ‘The King’s Rival,’ ‘The Loves of a Life,’ I have worked in partnership, but may

claim, at least, half the honours of invention, as well as dramatic treatment. In others, as 'Still Waters Run Deep,' 'Retribution,' 'The House and the Home,' and 'The Fool's Revenge,' I have worked on themes supplied by the plays or novels of others. But, wherever I have done this I maintain that comparison of my work with that on which it is founded, will show that I have nowhere confined myself to the functions of the mere reproducer of another man's thoughts in another language, but that I have thought for myself, and engrafted dramatic shoots of my own growing upon the stocks which I have transplanted.

"I have to set your critic right on several matters of fact connected with the originality of the few of my plays which he has referred to by name. 'Payable on Demand' is entirely my own. I know nothing of the play called 'Feurige Kohlen,' to which he refers as having suggested it. While 'Babes in the Wood,' 'An Unequal Match,' and 'Victims,' are perfectly free from any debt, whether for subject or treatment, to M. Cormon, or any other person.

"With regard to the other cases mentioned, they

come within the scope of the explanation or argument quoted from my Preface to 'The Ticket-of-Leave Man.' I can only say, in conclusion, that I have, both in that Preface and in this letter, understated the proportion of my own work to that of the foreign author in my adaptation ; and that, if the history of most of my collaborations could be told in full, it would support a claim to far more than half the credit to joint authorship.

"I think I may, in justice, claim the insertion in the *Athenæum* of this rectification of the article which has prompted my letter. TOM TAYLOR."

"THERE is nothing in Mr. Tom Taylor's letter influential enough to change my notion as to the meaning of the term 'originality.' The passage reproduced from the Preface to 'The Ticket-of-Leave Man' is equivalent to the passage quoted by me from the Preface to 'The Fool's Revenge.' In both the theory advanced is opposed to mine. Which is correct is matter of opinion. Mr. Taylor supposes I have gone to my conclusion on in-

sufficient data. He expects me to read the 'hundred plays, more or less, which he has given to the stage,' before I form my opinion. I think I know enough. I know the plays which made Mr. Taylor's reputation and maintain it. It is by these he is to be judged, and by these I have judged him. When he tells me that in writing 'Payable on Demand' he had no knowledge of another play with similar motive and cardinal incident, I accept his word. Only the resemblance between 'Feurige Kohlen' and 'Payable on Demand' is strangely great, just as the resemblance between 'The Contested Election' and 'Our Town,' by a Mr. Davies, of Warrington, is strangely great. In the *Athenæum* for July, 1859, I find this Mr. Davies complaining that in his play, and in Mr. Taylor's original play, which subsequently appeared, the gross venality of small boroughs was exposed; that each of the pieces has a wealthy grocer averse to political or municipal honours, but pushed on by an ambitious wife, in turn the tool of a penniless adventurer, who, in each piece, is made to write the candidate's address; and that 'the latter part of

both pieces is sustained by remittance of half-notes, and they alike are liable to the charge of allowing minor personages to rise into unwonted importance.' Mr. Taylor, in reply, stated that he first learnt the existence of Mr. Davies's play from Mr. Davies's letter, and that he was 'wholly at a loss to account for the resemblances he appeals to in proof of his inference.' This therefore is not the only instance in which something occurs to Mr. Taylor which has already occurred to another distinct mind.

"Mr. Taylor says he has 'in his printed plays invariably mentioned the source to which he is indebted for his story.' May I be allowed to ask—did Mr. Taylor announce on the play-bills, from which the public get their knowledge, that the plays avowedly taken from other plays were so derived? In other cases (as in the case of 'Plot and Passion,' of which Mr. Taylor claims 'half the honours of invention')—did Mr. Taylor ever give the 'other half' of the honours to his *collaborateur*? Has the name of John Lang ever appeared on one of Mr. Taylor's title-pages?

“On the question of originality I fear Mr. Taylor and myself will not agree. “Q.”

“I am most reluctant to occupy your columns with a personal controversy, the critical points of which I am quite willing to leave to the public; but I am compelled to correct misstatements of fact, and, above all, to repel insinuations of dishonourable conduct. I feel that the insinuations in ‘Q.’s’ last article amount to no less. I have repudiated, in the most distinct terms I can use, any knowledge of a play called ‘Feurige Kohlen.’ ‘Q.’ accepts my word—for which, I suppose, I ought to be grateful to him. He does not allude to my equally distinct repudiation of any debt to M. Cormon in the case of ‘Babes in the Wood,’ ‘An Unequal Match,’ and ‘Victims,’ in respect of which ‘Q.’ had insinuated rather than alleged my obligation to plays of that author. But he goes on to say *only* (the italics are mine) the resemblance between ‘Feurige Kohlen’ and ‘Payable on Demand’ is *strangely great*: just as the resemblance between ‘The Contested

Election' and 'Our Town,' by a Mr. Davies, of Warrington, is *strangely great* ;' and then follows a passage, to support the conclusion that 'Fleurige Kohlen' 'is not the only case in which something occurs to Mr. Taylor which has already occurred to another distinct mind.' If I am wrong in construing the italicized passages into a sneering insinuation that I am a plagiarist, *and something worse*, I beg 'Q.'s' pardon. If, however, the resemblance which 'Q.' now alleges be like that which Mr. Davies fancied in 1859, *cadit quæstio* ; for the resemblance between my play and that of Mr. Davies, however close it may have seemed on Mr. Davies's statement, when tested by actual comparison of the two pieces, as I remember having tested it at the time, is void of anything that can support the charge of plagiarism ; and so, I have no doubt, it would turn out to be in the other case.

"'Payable on Demand' was suggested by a well-known incident in the early history of the Rothschild family. 'Fleurige Kohlen' may very likely be founded on the same incident. I have no doubt this common origin will account for any resemblance

there may be between the two, just as common incidents of electioneering ambition and corruption explain the alleged resemblance in the case of 'The Contested Election.' Knowing myself to be the sole contriver of the somewhat complicated incidents by which the plot of 'Payable on Demand' is worked out, I am certain, on the theory of literary probabilities, that they *cannot* have been hit upon by a German author before I invented them. Has 'Q.' compared the plays? If he has not, will he do so, and inform me privately, or the public, through the *Athenaeum*, of the result? I should be extremely obliged to him.

"'Q.' asks if I have been in the habit of avowing the sources of my plays in the play-bills. I beg to inform 'Q.'—whom I take, from his articles, to be practically ignorant of theatrical matters—that, as a rule, the author of a play, according to my experience, is innocent of all knowledge of the play-bills till after they are printed. But I have no doubt that, in the play-bills announcing my pieces, the usual practice has been followed, *viz.*, of describing adapted plays as 'new,' unadapted as

'new and original.' In the few cases where I have seen the bills before publication, I have been careful, particularly since so much has been written about originality, to state any foreign or borrowed materials of which I have availed myself, and with minuteness. I refer him for an example to the bills of 'Twixt Axe and Crown.' 'Q.' asks why the name of John Lang has never appeared on the title-page of 'Plot and Passion,' as having a right to 'half the honours of invention'? Simply because John Lang never wrote a line, suggested a character, or invented an incident of the play. Mr. John Lang, it is true, called my attention to the story on which the play is founded—that Fouché employed a body of abandoned women, whom he called his *cohorte Cythérienne*, to lure his enemies within his reach. Mr. Lang suggested this as a good subject for collaboration of Mr. C. Reade and myself, who were then working together. Mr. Lang himself afterwards wrote a play and a story on the subject. The story is published. The play, which was sent to Mr. Webster and read to Mr. A. Wigan in my presence and by my wish long after mine was

finished and in his hands, was never acted. My play was written without consultation, collaboration, or communication with Mr. Lang, and during his absence from London. Mr. A. Wigan knows all the circumstances of the case, but as they affect private character, though not mine, I am unwilling to introduce them into a public correspondence; but I shall be glad to communicate them privately to 'Q.' if he wishes to know how fully they support my answer to his question. I am sincerely anxious that this correspondence may now end; that 'Q.' will leave me to vindicate my claims to originality by my work, and allow the public to judge between my plays and his charges.

"TOM TAYLOR."

"MR. TOM TAYLOR fails to see the ground upon which I stand. I am ready to believe that of the 'hundred plays, more or less,' which he has given to the stage, those with which I am unacquainted are original. I maintain, however, that of those which are known to the public the larger proportion 'owes something to somebody other than himself.'

Mr. Taylor is almost singular among dramatists for producing work which bears a resemblance to that of others. As to his play 'Payable on Demand,' I have already taken his word that he had not seen a German play with the same motive and cardinal incident when he wrote it. I am even ready to admit that 'The Rise of the House of Rothschild,' known to most middle-aged play-goers, was unknown to him. As to M. Cormon, I did not hint that the pieces named were taken from *plays* by M. Cormon. What I intended to say was, that M. Cormon himself might have 'suggested the subject,' just as Mr. John Lang 'suggested the subject' of 'Plot and Passion.' What Mr. Tom Taylor calls 'suggesting a subject,' however, Mr. John Lang calls 'joint-authorship.' In Lang's Preface to 'The Secret Police; or, Plot and Passion,' (1859), I find these words:—

"The reader is requested to observe that the story of the 'Secret Police; or, Plot and Passion' is not taken from the play of 'Plot and Passion,' (of which the author of these pages is the joint

author with Mr. Tom Taylor), but that the play 'Plot and Passion' was dramatized from the story."

"If, however, Mr. Lang was not Mr. Taylor's *collaborateur*—who was? The name of Mr. Taylor's partner in fame does not appear on the title-page of the play, which, in the Museum Catalogue, is described as 'an original drama, in three acts, by Tom Taylor, Esq.' Mr. Taylor gets the credit due for its composition; and if it were hereafter to become a noted piece, no one would believe that the author of 'a hundred plays, more or less,' to whom it is ascribed, was not the sole author.

"Mr. Taylor takes me to be 'practically ignorant of theatrical matters.' I find Mr. Taylor is right. I never before could have conceived that a man who translates or transforms a piece from the French had the right to call that piece his. Yet Mr. Taylor, 'practically acquainted with theatrical matters,' tells me I am wrong. Henceforth I am to suppose that if Mr. Emden brings Mr. Taylor a French play to translate and adapt for a theatre that the play is to be described as 'a new play

by Tom Taylor, Esq.' Why does not Mr. Taylor translate the *Iliad* and describe it as 'a new poem by Tom Taylor, Esq.'? Mr. Taylor tells me he is innocent of all knowledge of play-bills till after they are printed. Thus, I am to suppose that when he produced "‘The House or the Home?’" by Tom Taylor, Esq.,' he did not think it his duty to announce the play as 'by Octave Feuillet,' because to those 'practically acquainted with theatrical affairs' a 'new play by Tom Taylor, Esq.,' meant an original drama by a French author? When 'The House or the Home?' appeared, a correspondent of the *Critic* indicated its source; but Mr. Taylor was 'innocent of all knowledge of the play-bills' that had described him as author. However, when he printed his play, he was good enough to admit that the comedy was a 'free translation from Octave Feuillet's "Péril dans la Demeure."' I find other dramatists do not adopt Mr. Taylor's principle. I recollect that when Dr. Westland Marston produced 'A Hero of Romance,' he described it on the play-bills as 'by Octave Feuillet, revised by Westland Marston,' although

two-thirds of the play were altogether original. The same dramatist announced 'Donna Diana' as 'adapted and partly written' by himself, although he did more for it than Mr. Taylor did for the French play, which was announced as "The Ticket-of-Leave Man :" a new drama of every-day life, by Tom Taylor, Esq.'

"I don't know what to say to Mr. Taylor except that he is very original.

"P.S.—I find Mr. Taylor has an ally in Mr. Charles Reade. In a playful letter of his I see he calls me a shrimp and a minnow, and other names. I shall not discuss the question at issue with such a writer; but, as I find he has made my article on Mr. Tom Taylor the occasion for eulogy of Mr. Tom Taylor's current drama, I have a word for him.

"In referring to my phrase 'brutal realism,' as applied to the nightly roasting of Mrs. Rousby in Long Acre, Mr. Reade says: 'No Frenchman was ever the *hog* to comment on the same situation in a similar spirit.' Now, when Madame Rachel was burned, as Mrs. Rousby is burned, the most

eminent French critics—or, as Mr. Reade would call them, the most eminent French criticasters—used terms almost equivalent to mine. I will refer him only to one:—

“‘Pitoyables grimaces, ce bûcher, ce bourreau, ce peuple de quatre assistants, cette bûche inerte et cet esprit-de-vin trop subtil pour rien brûler! À quoi bon cet artifice indigne à la fois de l’histoire et de la tragédie? . . . Enfin telle est la cruauté inintelligente de cette façon d’écrire et de composer les tragédies, que même la poésie de l’histoire, la tragédie l’ôte sans pitié.’

“The writer is M. Jules Janin.

“Q.”

“I HOPED ‘Q.’ had done with me, and I with him. It is by no will of mine that I am forced, by respect for my own good name, to notice his last attack.

“First, let me set at rest the question of the authorship of ‘Plot and Passion,’ to which ‘Q.’

recurs. He quotes from the preface of Mr. Lang's 'Secret Police' two assertions,—that the author of the story is the joint author, with me, of 'Plot and Passion,' and that 'Plot and Passion' was dramatized from the story.

"The only substratum of fact underlying both these assertions is the circumstance I have already mentioned, that Mr. Lang called my attention to the anecdote on which the play and story are both founded. He never saw the play in progress; never wrote a line or suggested an incident of it; and I never saw his story before the play was written, nor, indeed, have I read it till now. But knowing, as I do, that 'Plot and Passion' is absolutely my own, I fearlessly invite 'Q.' to compare the play with Mr. Lang's story. I doubt if any resemblance will be found beyond what the common origin implies. If there be, the story has been indebted to the play, not the play to the story. 'Q.' asks—If Mr. Lang was not my *collaborateur* in 'Plot and Passion'—who was? My answer is very short—nobody. If the brief and bare suggestion of a subject makes joint authorship, Mr. John Lang is joint author of

‘Plot and Passion’; if not—not. As a matter of fact, I am solely answerable for the play.

“‘Q.’ complains that I will not see the ground he takes; that we cannot agree about the meaning of originality, and so forth.

“I perfectly see the ground ‘Q.’ takes, and I quite understand what ‘original authorship’ means. What ‘Q.’ seems unable or unwilling to understand is the difference between the terms ‘new’ and ‘new and original,’ as applied to plays, and as having always been applied to them, in playbill parlance, since I knew the theatre. A ‘new’ play means, and is understood to mean—at least by critics—a play presented for the first time to a British public. Supposing the *Iliad* a play, instead of a poem, a translation of it made and put on the boards by me would be a ‘new play by Tom Taylor’—little credit as the best translation might deserve, and much as it may irk ‘Q.’ that Tom Taylor should get any of that little. A ‘new and original play’ means a play invented, as well as written, by the author whose name it bears.

“Out of some hundred plays of mine, one-tenth

has in its time been 'new,' *i.e.* 'adapted,'—nine-tenths 'new and original,' *i.e.* subject, as well as treatment, my own. Such is, as nearly as possible, the actual proportions of my borrowed to my invented work. 'Q.' attacks me as if all my work was included under the category that covers one-tenth of it only. That he does not do justice even to my part in that tenth, and thereby betrays his utter innocence of all practical knowledge of what goes to successful play-writing, I may feel, but should never have dreamed of complaining.

"I cannot let 'Q.' off on the plea that this tenth he deals injustice on includes all my successful work. As a matter of fact, 'The Unequal Match' and 'The Overland Route' have been both as profitable and successful pieces—only not so frequently acted, because there are exclusive rights in both—as the 'Ticket-of-Leave' or 'Still Waters'; and I could set an 'original' success against every 'adapted' one I have had, whether in comedy, drama, or farce. But let that pass. I will only ask all who can appreciate fair dealing if I have not reason to complain of a critic who, when dealing with the

corpus of my work as a dramatic author, ignores nine-tenths of it altogether, while he indulges in the most serious mis-statements and groundless insinuations as to the other tenth? And now I promise to bestow no more of my tediousness on the readers of the *Athenæum*. Whatever 'Q.' may choose to write, like Iago, 'From this time forth, I never will say word.'

"TOM TAYLOR."

"I MUST ask leave to correct an exaggeration into which I have fallen in putting the sum of my dramatic works at 'a hundred plays, more or less.' I wrote without counting. I should have written 'eighty,' instead of 'a hundred'; and this includes *collaborations*. For the purpose of my argument the correction is immaterial, as the proportion of 'adapted' to 'original' work remains as I stated it—about one-tenth to nine-tenths.

"T. T."

“MR. TAYLOR should not say he is tedious. I have not found him tedious. The way, for instance, in which he has ‘set at rest’ the question of the authorship of ‘Plot and Passion’ is at once interesting and original.

“Mr. Taylor says (*Athen.* May 27th) :—“Q.” asks —If Mr. Lang was not my *collaborateur* in ‘Plot and Passion’—who was? My answer is very short —nobody. . . . I am solely answerable for the play.”

“Mr. Taylor had, however (*Athen.* April 29), already used these words—‘In the case of other pieces, like “Plot and Passion,” “Masks and Faces,” “The King’s Rival,” “The Loves of a Life,” I have worked in partnership, but may claim, at least, half the honours of invention, as well as dramatic treatment.’ Mr. Lang, too, had said (Preface to his novel),—‘The story of the “Secret Police; or, Plot and Passion” (of which the author of these pages is the joint author with Mr. Tom Taylor),’ &c.

“Mr. Taylor announced he had a partner. Mr. Lang announced he was that partner. How, then, am I, ‘practically ignorant of theatrical matters,’ to be blamed for believing that the play described in

the Museum Catalogue as 'an original drama in three acts, by Tom Taylor, Esq.,' owes 'something to somebody other than' the author? Now that the question of authorship has been 'set at rest' by Mr. Tom Taylor himself I will not disturb it. I am as content as Mr. Taylor.

"As to the general question, I am where I was. I cannot see that I am unfair to Mr. Taylor because, in dealing with one-tenth of his work, I decline to discuss the merits of the nine-tenths, to which I have not referred.

"Mr. Taylor is still of opinion that, were he to translate and place on the stage the 'Hecuba' or 'Medea,' by Euripides, the drama would be adequately described as 'a new play by Tom Taylor, Esq.,' and complains that he cannot get me to understand that 'new' means 'adapted.' I cannot help myself. Practically ignorant of theatrical matters, I hitherto believed that when a work is announced as 'by' a man, that man is the author even though the epithet 'new' is not added to the description. The information that 'a new play' announced by a well-known dramatist may have

been previously written by somebody else has, therefore, astounded me. An 'adapted' play should be so described. If a drama is composed by Mr. Taylor, the statement that it is 'by Mr. Taylor' is sufficient. There is no occasion for the words 'new and original.' If a play is 'adapted' from somebody else, let the real author's name be given.

"I have hope the controversy, which ends with these lines, may have the effect of modifying the practice of juggling with words in matters of some importance.

"Q."

CHAPTER IX.

MR. CHARLES READE.

MR. CHARLES READE is a literary fusee. You have only to touch him and he goes off. He reminds me when he has a quarrel, of one of those nondescript dogs which one sometimes meets in out-of-the-way farm-houses in Wales. You accidentally rub against him, and the casual collision is resented. A gesture excites him. From good-nature you stroke him in passing, and are rewarded with a yelp. The poor dog does not mean harm : it is his nature to yelp, and he yelps. This is the case with Mr. Reade. He prints the name of an antagonist in the smallest minion, and, with picturesque emphasis, places that of himself and those of his friends in the biggest capitals. Somebody says something somewhere of some play by him, and he proceeds to rail. He writes a

novel that does not give complete satisfaction to everybody, and—he rails. He produces a play which the public does not altogether approve, and—he rails. He takes a theatre, and some captious critic inconsiderately censures what is produced, and—he rails. He is perpetually railing. His violence, I am willing to believe, is not malevolent ; it is only whimsical—due less to predetermined design than to an ill-conditioned temper of mind. Seemingly vigorous, his anger is really lady-like in being unreasoning and capricious. Now I do not object to Mr. Reade becoming angry on his own account. But I do not think he is justified in exhibiting his anger when another, and not he, is in question, especially when that other is presumably more able to defend himself. Even the Welsh nondescript will not, I have been told, bark when another dog is touched : it is only his own dignity he preserves. This distinction is not observed by Mr. Reade. In expressing my opinion that some of Mr. Tom Taylor's dramatic work is not wholly original, I reached a pitch of presumption which astonished Mr. Reade. Mr. Taylor replied to me in a dignified

spirit, pointing out where I was wrong, and, where I was clearly right, extenuating his practice by pleading custom. Mr. Reade could not be satisfied with such method of reply. He would have the world know what he thought of me. He sent his opinion to the *Athenæum*; but that journal, evidently considering the writer was obtruding his activity in an undue direction, declined to print it. The editors of the other journals to whom it was dispatched also refused; and, had it not been for the opportune generosity of the conductor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, who gave it a place after a fortnight had elapsed and much talk had been occasioned in literary society by its suppression, the manifesto would have found circulation only in the United States of America, where, it seems, the eccentric writer is more fully appreciated than among ourselves.

Mr. Reade, in this letter, discussed my literary status, but did not question my facts, except in one particular, where he was wrong. He is in the habit of drawing distinctions with a difference, and is of opinion that roasting by fire is "neither more nor

less fit to be represented faithfully than death by poison or cold steel." I will not quarrel with this opinion ; I record it only for the purpose of noting that which is at the base of all his work. This characteristic defect is want of good taste. Mr. Reade is best known as a novelist ; he has written two or three admirable tales ; but he is also a playwright, his name being attached to dramas composed and invented by himself, to dramas in which he has had a *collaborateur*, and to dramas in which the characters and incidents already existed in literature but have been subjected to his manipulation. With the original pieces I am only imperfectly acquainted, and will not, therefore, speak of them. Among those written in conjunction with another, "Masks and Faces," an exceedingly neat and well-constructed drama, is well known and deservedly popular. On the other hand, "Foul Play," in which Mr. Boucicault assisted him, is one of the poorest pieces ever submitted to the public.

The dramas compiled by Mr. Reade himself from his own novels or from the works of other men, are the most pretentious and important. Of these,

“Never too Late to Mend,” founded on a powerful story of the same name, and produced at the Princess’s in 1865, “Dora,” a rustic and poetical drama, first presented in 1867 at the Adelphi, “The Double Marriage,” with which the new Queen’s Theatre was opened the same year, and “Free Labour,” from the novel “Put Yourself in his Place,” are those which I can best recall. Each of these has grave faults. Mr. Reade’s fundamental position appears to be, that what is real is suitable for purposes of art. He defends the roasting of an actress in the character of Joan of Arc, “with her rapt eyes fixed on the God she is going to,” as being “of a grander and more poetical nature than the death of Hamlet or of Macbeth,” and is clearly influenced by his belief that history lent the dramatist the situation. I will not presume to insist that my archæological knowledge is equal to that of Mr. Reade, and deny that the roasting is in conformity with fact. I content myself with maintaining that the reality of a situation does not make it suitable for dramatic purposes.

It is possible that an incident, such as a brutal

murder, or a bloody battle, or any hideous phase of torture, may be so fitly described in a story as to give pleasure to the reader, and yet be totally unfitted for representation on a stage. Such an exhibition would be loathsome. Sympathy must not be converted into suffering. Physical agony is rightly excluded from the realms of dramatic art. And yet Mr. Reade's most ambitious drama, "Never too Late to Mend," has physical agony for its central motive. There is one scene in which the treadmill is introduced. At this the audience, I remember, showed manifold signs of disapprobation. But the next scene displayed such brutal acts, such an aggregation of painful horrors, that the audience showed they appreciated the proper functions of art more sensibly than the author, and met the exhibition with cries of "Shame!" "Revolting!" "Stop the piece!" Mr. Reade perhaps considered the sensation he produced as evidence of his dramatic vigour. There is no reason, if his notions of art were to prevail, why the operations of a dissecting-room should not be performed on the stage.

"Dora" is founded upon Mr. Tennyson's poem of

the name, and which in turn is founded upon a story by Miss Mitford. "The Double Marriage" is founded upon Mr. Reade's story, "White Lies," and which in turn is founded upon M. Macquet's play, "The Château de Grandtière." In both there is excellent dialogue, and in both the author displays his possession of considerable dramatic ability. But both are marred by similar defects. In 'Dora,' the second act contains a scene in which William is represented as dying, and another in which the father is brought on with his leg broken. Both are so painfully realistic that they jar upon the feelings of the audience. The conduct of Josephine, again, in "The Double Marriage," is such as to alienate from her all sympathy. Her hasty acceptance of a new lover, so soon after the loss of the first, is felt to be revolting. As I have said, in all Mr. Reade's work, whether fiction, drama, or correspondence addressed to the public journals, there may be discovered instances of bad taste.

I cannot afford space to quote from Mr. Reade. The character of the man and of his work is, however, faithfully represented in the following extract

made from the playful letter of his to which I have alluded. The parallelism he institutes in the opening passages is worthy of Plutarch :—

“ I will take the two writers in their intellectual order.

“ MR. TOM TAYLOR

first distinguished himself as a scholar ; obtained a fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge. *Mutatis studiis*, he wrote for the theatre ; and his early pieces were nearly all original, though, at that time, originality was rarer than now. Between the years 1852 and 1856 I had myself the honour of working with him on four original dramas. I found him rich in knowledge, fertile in invention, and rapid in execution. Of late years he has been a very busy man ; he is the head of a public office, and the nation takes the cream of his day ; he is a steady contributor to the *Times* and to *Punch*, has published two biographies of great research, and yet has contrived to write many good dramas in prose and verse.

“ The mind is finite ; so is the day ; and I observe

that, writing for the stage in the mere fragments of his time, he now invents less, and imitates more, than he did some years ago. But, taking his whole career, the title of a dramatic inventor cannot be honestly denied him. He may not be a dramatist of the highest class—what living Englishman is?—but he resembles the very highest in this, that he sometimes adapts or imitates without servility, and sometimes invents.

“This accomplished writer in so many styles is the only man who of late years has filled a theatre by poetical dramas. His last is ‘Joan of Arc.’

“Is not this a remarkable man, as times go, and entitled to decent respect from the mere shrimps and minnows who write *about* literature, because they cannot write literature?

“MR. Q.

is a variety of the literary insect ‘Criticaster.’ He has been good enough to reveal his method: he went to the Queen’s Theatre to see ‘Joan of Arc,’ and weigh the author’s lines, and the author himself, in his little balance. He qualified himself as follows:

he turned his back on the stage, and fell to talking with another criticaster—the illustrious P.—about other plays of Mr. Taylor. They did not talk improvingly, for they merely played off a stale literary fraud, which I exposed two years ago under the title of the ‘Sham Sample Swindle.’ For all that, this part of ‘Q.’s’ narrative is interesting to me: I have long been asking myself to what class of society, and to what depths of the human intellect, belong those chattering snobs who always spoil a play for poor me whenever I go to the public part of a theatre.

‘Revealed the secret stands of Nature’s work.’

They are criticasters, sent in there by too confiding editors to hold their tongues and give their minds to the play.

“At the last scene it suddenly occurred to ‘Q.’ that he must not go away knowing nothing of the play he was sent there to know all about, and this led to a dialogue I reproduce verbatim, simply remarking that to me, who am a critic, it reads like bad fiction:—

“‘May I venture to ask,’ said I, ‘if you have

reason to suppose that the drama we are now witnessing is derived from any foreign original ?' My friend was expanding his crush-hat. 'Certainly not,' he replied with emphasis, pointing to the stage, whereon they were roasting Mrs. Rousby ; 'I know no other dramatic author who, left to himself, would conceive the notion of presenting before an audience such brutal realism as that.' And my friend left.

"Now 'P.' never uttered those words. Every nation has two languages, the spoken and the written ; so uncouth and involved a sentence never flowed from a bad writer's mouth, it could only wriggle from a bad writer's pen. However, there it is—a monument of impudence, insolence, and ignorance. What these poor gropers in the backslums of the drama stigmatise as unprecedented realism has been enacted before admiring Europe, by the most poetical actress of the century, in the first theatre, and the most squeamish, of the civilised world. 'Joan of Arc' was one of Rachel's characters, and, in her hands, was burned to death night after night. The burning was represented with what a critic

would call ‘terrible fidelity,’ a criticaster ‘brutal realism.’ She stood on a small working platform arranged to fall about two feet to a stop. The effect was truthful, but appalling ; for when the fire had burned a little time, the great actress, who did nothing by halves, turned rigid, and seemed to fall like a burned log from her supports. It conveyed, and was intended to convey, that the lower extremities had been burned away, and the figure dropped into the flames. Of course the curtain fell like lightning then, and up to the moment preceding that awful incident the face of the actress shone like an angel’s and was divine with the triumph of the great soul over the very flames that were destroying the mortal body. Believe me, Sir, no author, French or English, can give his actress a nobler opportunity than this of rising to the level of poetry and history.

“ As to the notion that death by fire is unfit to be presented *coram populo*, this is the chimera of a few Anglo-Saxon dunces afflicted with the known intellectual foible of their race—the habit of drawing distinctions without a difference ; in other

words, the inability to generalize soundly. Death by fire is neither more nor less fit to be presented faithfully than death by poison or cold steel. Only the death of Joan d'Arc by fire, with her rapt eyes fixed on the God 'she is going to, is of a grander and more poetical nature than the death of Hamlet or of Macbeth.

"That the performance of this great scene at the Queen's Theatre suggested nothing nobler and more poetic to 'P.' and 'Q.' than *an actress roasted*, is not the fault of Mr. Taylor, nor of history, which lent him the situation. No Frenchman was ever the hog to comment on the same situation in a similar spirit; and I am therefore driven reluctantly to the conclusion that the brutal nation which burned the maid of Orleans is still, in some respects, at the bottom of mankind.

"Of course, if the part was vilely acted there would be some excuse for 'P.' and 'Q.' But, on the contrary, I hear it is well acted. The fault then lies with the critics. It is the old, old story: *Parvis omnia parva.* When little men, with

little heads, little hearts, little knowledge, little sensibility, and great vanity, go into a theatre, not to take in knowledge and humanity, but to give out ignorance and malice, not to profit by their mental superior, but to disparage him, they are steeled against ennobling influences, and blinded to beauties, however obvious. But the retribution is sure. 'Depreciation' is the writer's road to ruin. Men rise in our difficult art by the divine gift, and the amiable habit of appreciation: to appreciate our gifted contemporaries is to gather unconsciously a thousand flowers for our own basket. The depreciator despises his gifted contemporaries, and so gathers nothing but weeds and self-deception. The appreciator makes a name, a fortune, and a signature. The depreciator tickles his own vanity, but gets to admire nothing, feel nothing, crush nothing, and be nothing—but a cypher signed by an initial."

THE END.

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